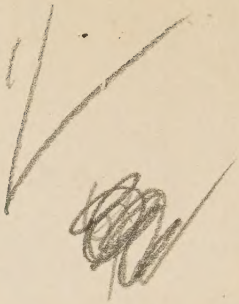

Richd Tolson.

Inscribed for Arthur Allen
with best wishes
by one of the Publishers,
six days in advance of
publication.

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FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

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FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

By

LADY AUGUSTA NOEL

"Dowglas! Dowglas!
Tendir and trew."

The Houlate.

LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS & MARROT, LTD.
1929

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INTRODUCTION

When first it was suggested to me that I should participate in literary rescue work, the spark of enthusiasm was found in me already smouldering. For since my schooldays I have carried in my head a little list of exceptions to the rule that in literature nothing good is allowed to die.

It used to surprise me that *everybody* hadn't read and enjoyed *Ravenshoe* or *The Moonstone*, but I realised that Henry Kingsley and Wilkie Collins had no need of rescue, and would figure in any full-dress review of Victorian literature.

Miss Emily Eden and Sheridan le Fanu seemed to be in a different category. They, I conceived, had mysteriously slipped through Posterity's net and required to be fished out again, and I longed, and often tried, to obtain recognition for the *Semi-Detached House* and its next door neighbour, and also for *Uncle Silas*, the best of all sensational novels.

The publishers of the *Rescue Series* heard my cry, and the great success of the *Semi-Attached* and the *Semi-Detached* has justified my youthful judgment.

Uncle Silas, I found to my sorrow, is, after all, in no need of rescue. He has never been entirely lost sight of.

Success is stimulating, and Miss Eden's revival fired my enthusiasm for missionising among unfortunate gentlewomen. The good work, entered upon in high hopes, proved boring and disappointing in the extreme. Jane Austen doubtless founded no school as Lytton Strachey has done, but she set a fashion among polite gentlewomen

which must have flooded the bookshops with three-volume novels of the very mildest and thinnest milk and rosewater. I have waded of late through oceans of megrims, misunderstandings and veneration for coronets. It is difficult to believe that during the first half of the 19th century, when the polite novel of manners divided the field with the novel of terror produced by the romantic movement, any particle of literary merit escaped Posterity's net.

How different when the hungry 'forties gave place to the tremendous 'fifties. It is only necessary to note the range and merit of the host of novels published at the time of the Mutiny to appreciate that by that time no form of novel known to us to-day remained untried and unperfected. It seemed to me, therefore, that my search should be directed to the 'sixties and 'seventies, when competition was so great that real merit might escape the net.

And at last, searching my memory and the libraries of several country houses, I ran to earth (on a false clue) one more forgotten novel of merit, long ago recommended to me in my boyhood by my mother, to whose taste I also owed my enthusiasm for Miss Eden's novels.

This is Lady Augusta Noel's *From Generation to Generation*. After a lapse of twenty-five years I find no reason to alter my opinion of its merits and breadth and charm.

Lady Augusta Noel, the author of *From Generation to Generation*, was born in 1838, the youngest daughter of the 6th Earl of Albemarle. Lord Albemarle fought at Waterloo in the 14th Regiment, rose to the rank of General, was at one time M.P. for East Norfolk, and Groom-in-Waiting to Queen Victoria. Her mother was a daughter of Sir Coutts Trotter. In 1873, Lady Augusta became the second wife of Mr. Ernest Noel, son of the Rev. the Hon. Baptist Noel, who is still living at the great age of 98. I have therefore been able to derive information regarding Lady Augusta and the novel from so valuable

an authority as Mr. Noel himself. (Are there, I wonder, half-a-dozen men alive who could boast a father-in-law who fought at Waterloo?) At the time of the novel's writing and publication Mr. Noel was M.P. for Dumfries Burghs. He possesses other Scottish connections in the fact that his mother was a Baillie of Dochfour. As will be seen later, it is of some importance to record the Scottish connections of the family. Lady Augusta was the author of other novels which were widely read: *Wandering Willie*, *Owen Gwynne's Great Work*, *The Wise Man of Sterncross*, and two charming children's stories, *Effie's Friends* and *Conrad the Squirrel*. She died on January 31, 1902. She must not be confused with another Lady Augusta Noel, who was fifteen years her senior, Augusta Mary, sister of the 3rd Earl of Lonsdale, who married the Right Hon. Gerard Noel, a first cousin of Mr. Ernest Noel. During their lives the two ladies must not seldom have been confused, and it is curious to note that the publication *Who was Who* attributes to each lady the authorship of *The Wise Man of Sterncross*.

From Generation to Generation was first published by Macmillan's in 1879 in two volumes. A second edition in one volume followed the next year, and the novel was translated both into French and German in the 'eighties.

It is a romance of Scottish life, and concerns the history of two noble families—Scottish and French—which were allied by marriage, and for weal and woe constantly cut each other's circle generation after generation.

I do not propose to tell the story nor divulge the plot nor make quotation from the text. The plot is responsible for sustaining a good part of the interest, while the style depends less on fine or epigrammatic writing than on clarity and consistency. It is a great canvas packed with figures in every variety of dress, having as its central feature Dalbraith, the old grey castle of the Douglas family.

The story opens about the year 1830, the main action is set between 1840 and 1860, but the scope of the tale is far wider, and by various ingenious interpolations the reader becomes gradually and naturally familiar with family history two hundred years farther back. It is true romance, for, woven into a fine plot, a number of chivalrous characters are developed, and take their appointed places in the scheme and leave behind, when the story is finished, a haunting impression of reality, of truth, of history. Above the vibrant note of Doom, the triumphant march of a great Destiny, brave hopes, high courage, sounds in measured cadence.

With a scope so broad, a canvas so wide, great skill is required to keep the characters distinct and consistent. Consistency is indeed demanded not only for individuals. Consistency in hereditary characteristics is also demanded and achieved. Were it not exuberant, having regard to the limitations imposed on a mid-Victorian lady, I would not reject comparison of the skill shown by Lady Augusta in this particular with the achievements of Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy in *The Old Wives' Tale* and *The Forsyte Saga*. I deny myself the temptation. *From Generation to Generation* can stand comparison, none the less, with fine novels, and can shew, at any rate, four essentials of a classic—length and consistency, a good prose style, and infinite pains. There is nothing slovenly about it. Every page gives evidence of ceaseless vigilance and unrelaxing care. The walking-on parts are as carefully, as consistently, treated as the chief parts. There are admirable studies of Highland ghillies and East Anglian peasants; there are, for example, such brilliant miniatures as the rich spinster in her house in Whitehall, the French attaché snobbishly preoccupied with his London season invitations, the soldier servant, the Meenister's wife. Finally, there is Grizel, an unchanging type in Highland families, an undeniable bore, gladly tolerated for her loyalty and

devotion. About these minor characters, there is nothing that dates; they are not topical caricatures, they are for all time, a reading from humanity. As for the protagonists, Margaret, Marion, Lady Beatrix, Norman, the two Ronalds, these are real people, characters in fiction whom art makes to live during and far beyond the reading of the book.

Unquestionably the character of Margaret Douglas was Lady Augusta's most careful and important creation. Lady Douglas is by nature a woman reserved, shy, uncompromising. Her devotion to her husband absorbs her; his untimely death turns that devotion into a grief not less absorbing, which leads her to shut herself off in the selfish contemplation of her short happiness and life-long misery and thereby to ruin the lives of those whose happiness was his chief concern. It is a fine creation and within their limitations the others I have named worthily set it off.

There is a great novel, already mentioned, a minor classic, with which it is appropriate and fair in my opinion to compare Lady Augusta's novel. That is Henry Kingsley's *Ravenshoe*. The similarity of design and treatment instantly occurred to me. I am ready to put to public test the question whether *From Generation to Generation* may not stand beside it for comparison in many essentials of the romance writer's art, may not still earn the title of The Scottish "*Ravenshoe*."

It is as big in range and less diffuse in purpose. More homogeneous and not less colourful. More careful of detail, not less consistent in character-making. Its misunderstandings and mischances ring truer and are not infuriating as Kingsley's too often are. Its devices to retrieve the impending ruin of its puppets' lives never appear artificial, because of that sense of the inevitability of destiny, which, like the atmosphere of the Scottish home, is never dissipated. It was written eighteen years after

Ravenshoe, but it has shed a score of the antiquated and clumsy devices which Henry Kingsley employed.

Nowadays there are moments when one prays for a new romance, at a time when even successful novelists are seduced to employ their talents in detective fiction; moments when one prays for a novelist who will steal back some of the fire of the old romance writers, voluntarily ceded by their successors to the modern biographers; and now and again the longing grows insistent for one more fine story about the gentlemen and great ladies of a vanished age, written by some one capable not only of appreciating, but of describing accurately, their habits, customs and manner of thought.

In the first half of the 19th century, such stories were written by the score, but for the most part they lacked blood and bone, humanity, generosity, purpose, *guts*. They were anæmic, artificial studies in manners, meet for the breakfast parlours of their day.

From Generation to Generation is a romance of gentlefolk, but they are flesh-and-blood women and men, to whom social conventions are not absolute tyrants. With them humanity is above manners and purpose overrides convention. Its combination of a picturesque and typically Highland setting, of admirable plot and clear-cut characterisation, would, if I were a film producer, suggest to me a rich field for British enterprise united to knowledge and taste. It is a book for the fireside in winter, for autumn evenings in the Highlands, beside the glowing peats. More than that, it is a bedside book. And that is high praise.

Lady Augusta's remarkable understanding of the lore and humours of rural life in East Anglia was acquired from childhood in her own home. I referred earlier to the importance of recording her Scottish connections. Even those who may miss the charm of the story, must accord tribute to her extraordinary power of "putting-across" the atmosphere of Highland life.

On this point I was at pains to consult Mr. Noel. He believes that Lady Augusta never came to Dumfries, unless to hear the poll declared, but he adds that she was a constant visitor to the Highlands and well acquainted with many of the old Scottish families. He believes, but is not certain, that the description of *Dalbraith* was in part taken from Glamis. This is an interesting light. To my thinking, the description of the building more nearly suggests Cawdor, but neither Cawdor nor Glamis furnish the immediate surroundings of *Dalbraith*, which obviously lay, not on the fringe, but in the very heart, of the moorland and the lochs.

It will not fail to interest readers of this preface and the novel to hear that Mr. Noel's own favourite among Lady Augusta's books is *Owen Gwynne's Great Work*, but he admits that the novel now under review appealed to a much larger public.

Those who possess old copies may observe that the introductory pages are here omitted. For this action some justification seems to exist.

One further point and I will finish. As I re-read after long years this half-forgotten tale, I was struck once more by two features, the extraordinary sense of "real life" which it produces, and the elaborate attention to detail revealed by the author.

I set myself to catch her tripping . . . and once seemed to have succeeded. I noted that "Lady" Beatrix was described as a daughter of an earlier Lord Douglas—and the Douglas title was that of Baron. Here it seemed was a tiny slip. Not a bit of it. A few pages afterwards, her title is justified by a patent of the exiled King James! It is this meticulous care that helps to produce the sense of reality, to clothe the characters in flesh and blood. It set me to the task—a joyful task—of working out a family tree of the Douglas and Beaurepaire families, which may assist or amuse the reader. It is a

further tribute to Lady Augusta Noel. I feel certain that she herself worked with such another tree ever before her; aye, and with a compass and a map of the *Dalbraith* Estate and a Dictionary of Dates, to supplement her own fine memory and imagination. It is not every novel that can evoke a posthumous interest in its puppets and their ancestry.

So much for prologue. I hope and believe that Lady Augusta will be received as Miss Eden has been received, and will justify, as Miss Eden did, my judgment. But the two ladies have not much in common. Virtue, true religion, taste, breeding, breadth of mind, these are points of similarity. But one was a Whig of the inner circle of Whigs: the other, whatever the outward label, was, at heart at any rate, a Tory. One was a wit: the other a creator. One was shrewd and quick, a little worldly, a trifle contemptuous outside her own restricted circle: the other (I am guessing) possessed a measure of that calmness and mysticism, patience and bigness of soul which are found in every recipe for genius.

Those who have read *The Semi-Attached Couple* and *From Generation to Generation* may observe other points of difference in the natures of the two ladies. By conceding to Lady Augusta the approval a second time accorded to Miss Eden, the public can add one further point of similarity.

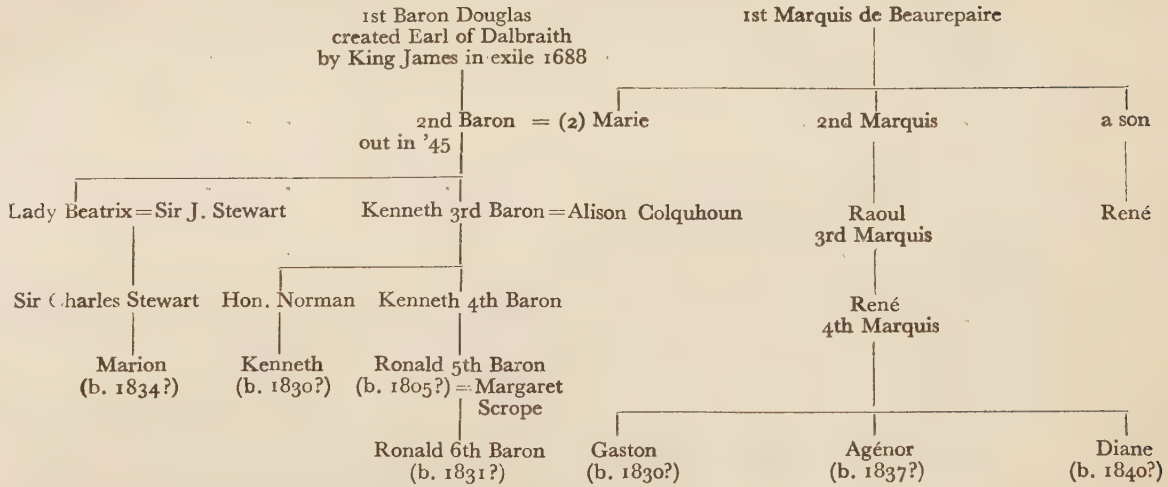
JOHN GORE.

1929.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	v
I.	DOUGLAS OF DALBRAITH	15
II.	"THE BONNIE HIELAND HEATHER"	28
III.	THE FOOT OF TIME	43
IV.	AS MORNING SHOWS THE DAY	62
V.	"SNOW FALLS IN THE RIVER"	86
VI.	DULE AND SORROW	109
VII.	A WORLD WITHOUT A SUN	128
VIII.	THROWN AWAY	148
IX.	LORD RONALD, MY SON	167
X.	LOOKING BACK	199
XI.	WESTMINSTER CHIMES	225
XII.	GOOD INTENTIONS	251
XIII.	"AUF WIEDERSEHEN"	274
XIV.	A LEGACY	297
XV.	DIANE	321
XVI.	CROSSING THE FORD	342
XVII.	FAITHFUL FOUND	366
XVIII.	TENDER AND TRUE	390
	LAST WORDS	415

DESCENT OF THE FAMILIES OF DOUGLAS AND BEAUREPAIRE



Notes. (*a*) The 1st Baron and the 1st Marquis are so numbered to distinguish the generations mentioned in the story.
(*b*) The story opens with the marriage of the 5th Baron.
(*c*) Lady Beatrix's tragic romance concerns Raoul 3rd Marquis, and René of the same generation.
(*d*) The marriages of the chief characters, Ronald 6th Baron and Kenneth, son of Norman, are left to be revealed by the story.
(*e*) Norman married late in life. Hence Ronald (6th) and Kenneth, though contemporaries, are of different generations.
(*f*) Grizel I take to be a distant cousin and she is not included in the tree.
(*g*) The dates of birth are pure conjecture.

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

CHAPTER I

DOUGLAS OF DALBRAITH

"It was an English lady bright,
(The sun shines fair on Carlisle wall,)
And she would marry a Scottish knight,
For Love will still be lord of all."

Lay of the Last Minstrel.

DALBRAITH was only a fragment of the great estates that had once belonged to Douglas's forefathers. It was their first possession and their last. Bit by bit had their territories fallen away from them in the troublous and hard-fighting times of early Scottish history. A younger branch of the great house of Douglas, they had always shown a genius for taking up with the losing side. Of course also in later times they were hot Jacobites, and after they had been out in the '45 their estates were confiscated, and only Dalbraith, won by a marriage with a Highland heiress, remained to them. It had been a fortress in their proud feudal days—in their later prosperity a hunting lodge—now it was the resting-place of the old family, as it had been once their playground.

To eyes which had patience and skill to read the scattered signs, the house might perhaps tell its story with sufficient faithfulness.

Its one square tower and the crumbling bit of castellated wall stood up strong still in their rude masonry. Close by, the narrow windows and pepper-pot turrets told of the old hunting-lodge. Later, a hall and gallery, and a few rooms, had been added to the dwelling-house when the Douglas's "came home."

All now was weather-stained and storm-beaten alike, and over the whole building had settled that peculiar and tender charm that gathers round a fallen house.

There was no garden; there never had been one near the house. Rough grass grew right up to the walls, and rugged willow-trees bent over some patches of water that remained from the defaced moat.

Dalbraith House lay low, and the brae rose sharply between it and the loch. Only from one or two of its higher turrets could a glimpse be caught of that winsome vision—the rippling stretch of water and its steep winding shores, the heather and broom-covered cliffs, and the big hills beyond.

In the old days they seem to have made little study of the site for their dwellings. Often you come upon them hidden away heedlessly under the shadow of a hill, with little but wild and desolate moor to be seen from the windows. And yet that very carelessness has a sort of charm, from its proud disregard of all the wealth of beauty lying within reach. The old lords of the soil were not careful, as are people in these anxious modern times, to make the very best possible display of the good gifts showered down lavishly upon them.

With a haughty consciousness of the glories of their land, they scorned to sue for an appreciation of them as do the southerners who have invaded their wild fastnesses now-a-days.

Though there were no trim pleasure-grounds near the house, "my Lady's garden" lay towards the west along the sunny side of the hill. You reached it by a little rough glen that cleft the moor to let a brown burn flow into the loch. Crossing that you came at once into the bright sunshine, for it had grown to be almost a superstition in those parts, that were there but one sun-gleam in the sky, it would surely shine upon the rose trees and yew hedges of my lady's garden.

The origin of the pretty fancy may well have been that it was planned and made by very happy people in a singularly lovely summer season, for it was laid out thirty years, or thereabouts, ago, when Ronald Douglas, Baron Douglas of Dalbraith, brought his English bride, Margaret Scrope, home to the north.

They worked at it together, he and she, early and late, and long afterwards it was remembered by the workmen how merry a business they made of it. Lord Douglas threw his whole heart into it, for he said his wife must miss the trim orderliness and faultless keeping of her English home. But it was not really as he thought; she scarcely cared for the new garden as much as he did. Stately as she looked, there was something that suited the young Lady Douglas, and specially charmed her, in the mingled wildness and homeliness of Dalbraith. She never had the least wish to alter things, or to make them either grander or more modern. She just took the place to her heart at once, as she would have taken anything and everything that had to do with Ronald.

At home she had been the beauty of her family, and a certain composure and reserve in her manner made her brothers call her "very grand." They

used to say that Meg would never marry; she was far too unimpressionable to take a fancy to any one.

But all this was very quickly changed when she met the young Scotchman, Lord Douglas. It was wonderful to see how Margaret woke up and brightened, and how light and life came into her beautiful still face.

It was abroad that they first saw one another—in the quiet old French town of Saint Germain en Laye.

Margaret's grandmother, who lived chiefly in Paris, used to spend her summers there, and all the Scropes knew it well, and were fond of the dreamy old place, with its air of departed grandeur. They liked the grand terrace over-hanging the vineyards and the valley of the Seine, the sunward sloping côte, and the glades and alleys of the forest.

One summer, Margaret had gone there with her mother and some of the children, at the end of the London season. It was lovely, hot weather, and they were all happy at escaping from the bustle and noise of London. Margaret was as much pleased as her little brothers and sisters with the journey, for it was something of a journey in those days. They travelled slowly, crossing the sea to Hâvre, then posting through the quaint towns and sunny orchards of Normandy, and along the poplar-bordered roads to Paris.

Lord Douglas was in France, too, at that time. The Douglases, as long back as their first exile with James II., had formed French connections and friendships, which were handed down from father to son, and kept up from generation to generation. Time and distance, it is true, somewhat slackened the old ties when the family went back to Scotland, but they existed still, and of late had been drawn together again more closely.

Douglas had been visiting his French kinsfolk at their château in La Vendée, and one of his cousins fell ill in Paris when they were on their way together to Dalbraith.

As soon as he was sufficiently recovered to be moved, the doctors ordered him out of Paris for change of air. He was not to go far at first; and Douglas, in his capacity of nurse, fixed upon Saint Germain, partly because the doctor praised it for its fine air, and partly moved thereto by a sentimental remembrance of the time when his ancestors broke their hearts and wasted their substance, at the forlorn court of James II.

So on the afternoon of their arrival at Saint Germain, Douglas established his friend on a rush-bottomed chair on the parterre, with a glorious panorama, certainly, stretched out at his feet, and he went away himself on a Jacobite pilgrimage. There was very little to be seen. The Stuarts and their poor, proud, faithful followers, had passed away like a dream. They showed him the gloomy old Château, now a prison, with high and dreary walls built round it, and the church where King James lies buried. And then he walked back down the Allée des Soupirs, where they say the exiled king used to pace wearily up and down. The parterre, once part of the Royal Gardens, is now the favourite walk of the Saint Germain fashionable world. A military band was playing, and people were sauntering up and down under the old cut chestnut trees, when Lord Douglas rejoined his cousin. It was the 12th of August, a gloriously fine day, and he was rather melancholy, thinking of his deserted moors.

As he turned the corner he encountered a merry troop of English children, with two or three ladies

following them, and René de Beaurepaire knew the ladies.

So Margaret Scrope and Douglas were introduced to each other: they stood on the great terrace and looked down the valley towards that view of Saint Denis that it irked Louis Quatorze to have perpetually before his eyes, and they made out Mont Valérien, and Paris beyond like a dim cloud, with the dome of the Invalides. Then Douglas walked beside Margaret down the Allée des Soupirs, and she showed him the old hunting-gate of the forest.

There was a primitive little French fête going on. In the evening the parterre was illuminated by strings of coloured lamps hung from one tree to another, down the arcades of the straight chestnut walks. The Scrope children thought it a fairy scene of beauty and enchantment; but perhaps Margaret and Douglas remembered it longer than any of them. The band of the Cuirassiers du Roi crashed out one stirring march after the other as the children went eagerly up and down the lighted alleys, with the elders following. Douglas won for himself golden opinions that night. He was willing to let them explore each booth and "guinguette" to their hearts' content. They visited all the swings and merry-go-rounds, where soldiers in full uniform and respectable mères de familles were revolving solemnly on little wooden horses; they laughed at the silent active dancers in their tent, and bought gilt ginger-bread and "sucre de pommes" at the bon-bon stalls.

The evening's entertainment came to an end with fireworks. Catherine-wheels whizzed, and rockets thundered up in the summer twilight, but the crowning glory of all was a "simulacre d'incendie" that sent the young Scropes into the seventh heaven

of admiration and ecstasy. And while they looked at the fireworks, Douglas watched Margaret's beautiful face by the light of the mimic flames.

Half an hour afterwards he was leaning out of a window in the Hôtel du Pavilion Henri IV., with his chin resting on his hands. The lights were all out in the chestnut alleys; the fête was putting itself to bed yonder on the parterre; a little fountain tinkled in the court of the hotel, and the moon was shining.

"Douglas," said his cousin, speaking from a sofa inside the room, "I'm afraid you must be frightfully bored here."

"I am not bored," answered Douglas, without turning his head. "Don't talk to me. I am so dreadfully in love."

And a week afterwards he was still lingering at St. Germain, though René de Beaurepaire had recovered, and was longing to be off. The whole Scrope party had come up one glowing August afternoon, to breathe the fresher air upon the terrace. The children were riding donkeys in and out among the trees at the entrance of the forest. Margaret and Lord Douglas had got their favourite Allée des Soupirs almost to themselves, except that by-and-by there came hobbling after them an old flower-woman, a pensioner of Margaret's grandmother, who carried a big basket on her arm full of fresh roses and carnations. She was an old, old woman, bent and lame and very ugly, with blear eyes, and a yellow handkerchief bound round her coffee-coloured visage, under which it looked like the face of a withered monkey.

"You look tired, Victoire," said Margaret, as she took a great cluster of rose-buds from Douglas's hand.

"*Ah que ça Mamzelle Marguerite. Je souffre bien, ma pauv' petite demoiselle*," mumbled the little old crone, peering up at the tall Margaret. "*Je suis lasse, allez ; je voudrais que le bon Dieu me retire.—Ah merci, mon beau Monsieur.*"

Perhaps Douglas's bright smile and still brighter five-franc piece modified Victoire's weariness of life for the moment. She grinned broadly, and then hobbled away in pursuit of another customer.

"Poor old thing!" said Lord Douglas, looking after her.

"*Je voudrais que le bon Dieu me retire*," repeated Margaret, with a half-smile. "I wonder if she really does wish it. How strange it seems for us to be so strong and happy, and—"

"Are you so happy?" interrupted Douglas. "Are you, really? I'm not. Margaret, I never can be again—unless—"

Just then, up came a donkey behind them at a surprised uncertain canter, and all the children swept round them, panting, and shouting to "Meg" to look at "Mary galloping."

Nevertheless, an hour later, Lord Douglas did confess that he was happy. Nay, if he and Margaret had been able to spare a thought from each other, to bestow on the old lame flower-woman, they would have acknowledged that the contrast between their lives and hers was more wonderful than ever.

They were married in the month of December, and after their wedding went straight home to the Highlands. The glens were white with winter when Margaret first saw them, and most people might well have hesitated to take a bride into so dreary a waste of snow as then lay for miles around Dalbraith. But she had set her heart on going, and already Douglas knew her well enough to have no fears.

No one came to break their solitude, and if in after years the sight of a snow-covered country ever made Margaret Douglas look sad, it was only because it recalled to her too vividly the beautiful days of her "ice honeymoon." She was far more like a child now in her youthful gaiety and high spirits than she had ever been in her life before. "It was a sight for sair e'en," said the few onlookers, to see two people so happy, and so goodly to behold, as were the young husband and wife.

There were not many retainers now-a-days at Dalbraith; but the scattered group of gillies and foresters, keepers and fishermen, who lived in bothies up the hills or along the loch-side, were one and all proud of the "gran' leddy" that "My Lord" had won for himself in the south. They thought it was the finest thing on this side the Grampians to see her, with her plaid wound round her and her petticoat kilted up, tramp through the snow beside her stalwart husband. "And she sae like a Queen," they would say to one another.

Poor Margaret was quite unconscious of the awe she inspired by her height, and her lofty manner, and her grave, clear intonation. At home, the boys said, "There goes Meg," and laughed at her when she was more than usually frigid, but it was different at Dalbraith.

In later times, when she had long won her place in the warm hearts of her Highland neighbours, Mrs. Maclean, the minister's good little wife, used to be fond of telling how frightened she was of Lady Douglas the first time she got sight of her after her marriage. "She just looked at me out of her great big eyes till I was fain to run away and hide myself, and there was the minister, worthy man, with never a gracious word of exhortation or encouragement

to help me out, but sitting up there in his best coat, smoothing his hat round and round and staring at her. A bit young lassie, too, as she was then, and he her own pastor and master!"

In truth, that first visit, a bridal one of solemn ceremony, had not been a success. All the autumn they had been talking of her coming, and many had been the consultations at the Manse as to how soon the sight of a woman's face would be a comfort, instead of an intrusion on the bride. For they heard of a mother and several sisters left behind in England, and it was rough weather in the North, and often when the wind was blowing its wild wintry tunes, tossing about the waters of the loch, and carrying hailstones on its wings, they wondered whether she ever found it lonesome or unhome-like at Dalbraith.

So, mixed up with her natural curiosity, little Mrs. Maclean's heart was full of womanly sympathy, and of pleasure in the young wife's happy love. Lord Douglas, in his bachelor days, had been used to make himself very much at home in the Manse parlour, where the master and mistress of the house were young folks like himself, and he and Mrs. Maclean often used to talk of the wife he was to bring home, "as soon," he said, "as he could find any one who would be kind enough to come." He came over the loch one snowy evening, a day or two after the home-coming, and drank tea in the cosy parlour, just as he used to do, in the days that already they were beginning to call "old times."

It was too rough and blowy a day, he said, even for "my wife" (how proudly the words were uttered); but Mrs. Maclean must see Margaret soon; and he sat with the firelight flickering on his happy face, and talked of her, laughing at the idea of any one ever being shy with Margaret. So on the earliest

fine day the all-important "first call" was to be made.

Unfortunately, Douglas was out of the way when the minister and his wife arrived at Dalbraith. Even the hall did not look familiar to them—it used to be such a bare, cold place, but now Douglas had been at work on it, making it, like the loch-side garden, fit for Margaret. It had been filled with colour and warmth to welcome her, and most picturesquely comfortable it looked that wintry afternoon, when already the ruddy firelight was conquering the cold white dazzle of the snow outside. Touches and gleams of red played among the stag's horns on the walls, and the heads of bearded mountain goats, and the stands of Highland arms. Douglas had hunted up some gorgeous curtains of old needle-work, wrought by the hands of dead and gone daughters of the house of Dalbraith, but voted too antiquated for use by his mother long ago; great bright rugs—trophies of his own Eastern travels—covered the stone floor, and before the fire-place was stretched a huge black bear-skin, the wedding gift of an Indian cousin.

From time immemorial, a baronial-looking arm-chair, highly carved, rigidly upright, now mercifully cushioned, had stood in the corner of the wide, stone chimney-piece, and in that sat Lady Douglas, with her lap full of letters, and in front of her crouched Douglas's deerhound, one big protecting paw and his watchful face laid upon her knee.

That first half-hour was simply terrible. Margaret was so tall, and sat so still, and her gown, though perfectly plain, had a way of sweeping back into such severe and statuesque folds. She never seemed to smile, at least with the ready, encouraging mechanical smile that Mrs. Maclean was used to.

The little woman's kind words of comfortable chat were frozen on her lips; Margaret sat looking at her with her grave, dark eyes, the idea of being at all formidable never even crossing her brain. The minister, good man, was simply struck dumb, as good men sometimes are, by a beautiful face, and he neither saw nor heeded his wife's reproachful glances.

It seemed quite odd to Mrs. Maclean that Douglas himself could venture to be familiar and at home with his wife. What a comfort it was when he came in, stamping the snow off his feet, and bringing with him a rush of misty frozen air. When Margaret gave him a letter to read, and he went away into the deeply-recessed window to catch the waning light, Mrs. Maclean felt the despair of a ship-wrecked sailor, who watches the slow vanishing of a rescuing sail. In the middle of his reading Lord Douglas laughed out loud, and Margaret forgot what she was saying, and laughed too, suddenly and joyously. Then she got up and came close to Mrs. Maclean's chair, saying, "Do forgive us; you must think us too rude, really." After that the worst was over; Lord Douglas came back and stood by the fire, stirring the peats into a blaze with his foot, and telling them some story, at which he laughed, until the echoes woke in the old rafters, and sent him back his laugh cheerily.

Nevertheless no entreaties could prevail on Mrs. Maclean to stay and dine with them that day, though Margaret seconded her husband's invitation heartily and kindly. Still, as she stood by the door with her husband, waching her departing guests, her brother Harold would have said that she looked as if she had swallowed the poker.

"And were ye just moon-struck, Minister?"

asked Mrs. Maclean, severely, as they walked down to the boat.

He shook his head with solemnity. "Eh, it's a grand face, Jeanie, a grand face she has, our young Leddy Douglas."

Therefore it was a great surprise to them to hear that this queen-like being delighted in snow-balling her husband; that she liked to run his messages, and would sit for hours on the hearthrug at his feet, looking up at him admiringly, and that on wet days the young couple used to play hide-and-seek in the queer nest of uninhabited rooms up at the top of the house, making the old walls ring with their steps and laughter.

They grew to understand her better by degrees. There came a day when to no one could Mrs. Maclean talk more comfortably about the parish and the bairns than to Margaret Douglas. And once when the Angel of Death crossed the threshold of the Manse, and "wee Isabel," the baby, the darling, the toddling, busy, bustling little creature, was summoned from her merry play, and shrill sweet laughter, and eager learning of her broken Scottish speech,—when she was gently called and silenced, lulled into dreamless sleep, and gathered tenderly into the quiet grasp of her Father's messenger; then Lady Douglas came to the Manse. She was not absent or cold then. Her tears and kisses rained down on to the little flower-face that was still warm and fresh. She kissed the pretty feet, the baby curls, the tiny brown hands, and the dead daisies that they clasped; and then she took the sorrow-stricken mother in her arms, and held her there. After that they loved her at the Manse. But perhaps she had listened to her own heart then, and there learnt sympathy, for the nursery was no longer a dead letter at Dalbraith.

CHAPTER II

THE BONNIE HIELAND HEATHER

" Down yon glen ye never will weary,
The flow'rs are fair, and the leaves are green;
Bonnie lassie, ye maun be my dearie,
And the rose is sweet in the dew at e'en."

THERE was sunshine at Dalbraith. High summer had come down upon the hills that knew so much of winter, and the rough peaks and outlines grew soft and brightened in her gracious presence. A while ago she plucked the snow-caps from the hoary mountain-heads, and flung them down in play to the leaping watercourses, to be melted and stained with moss, dyed with red earth, and sent down ruddy and racing into the burn below.

Now as midsummer drew on, the full loud music of the flowing water had fallen into a minor key. The stream went softly through the dry moorland, and at the Falls there were a thousand delicate rills that trickled and slided down channels in the rocks, in place of the one broad, white sweep with which at other times the rain-fed river flung itself down towards the loch.

The streams were too low for good fishing, said Lord Douglas, hospitably anxious, for the London season was on the wane, and there were rumours of many southern kinsmen who were coming to inspect " Meg's highland dungeon," all with grand vague visions of Douglas's salmon river, of his deer forest, and his moors.

Margaret Douglas stood one morning at the foot of the steps before the house, shading her eyes with one hand from the broad sunshine, and with the other stroking the nose of an old white shooting-pony. Laden with baskets and fishing-rods, old "Tam Glen" stood blinking drowsily in the sun, too well fed, or too sleepy, to trouble himself much about the carrot that Lady Douglas was dangling before his nose.

All round the sunlit heather was coming into bloom, though the full mass of colour had hardly yet flushed across the moor. Moss and bracken and birch-tree shone out like emeralds; the grey rocks threw sharp shadows down into the hollows; and the distant corries, lilac-tinged, faded away into light. Far off a covey of grouse rose whirring on the wing, and a heron sailed over head. In the foreground the pony's old white coat made the central spot of the picture, it was such a trap to catch the sun-beams.

"The beastie makes one's eyes water only to look at him," said Grizel Douglas, a maiden cousin who was staying at Dalbraith; "for all the world he's like nothing but a heap of nice clean clothes just home from the wash."

She came down briskly from the open turret-door, and patted Tam's shaggy shoulder so heartily that a small cloud of silver hairs flew up into the sunshine, and their owner turned back his pink eyes reproachfully towards the disturber of his slumbers.

Tam and Grizel Douglas were friends of many years standing. He was not half so white as now, when first she remembered him. Nor were her own stiff curls then tinged with grey. But time hath dealt gently with them both, as he generally does with those who go to meet him in a kindly and ungrudging spirit.

There must have been something intrinsically good and loveable in Grizel Douglas, to make all her people as fond of her as undoubtedly they were, though she had a way of riding rough-shod, with cheerful unconsciousness, over all their pet prejudices, and, as Lord Douglas said of her, she had never done a wrong thing in her life, nor said a right one.

Every family would be the better of a Cousin Grizel of its own. The Douglas kinsfolk almost quarrelled at times for the possession of their's. With a heart at leisure from itself, and a tough tireless body, Grizel revolved round the cousinhood, shedding the beams of her deft helpfulness wherever either joy, or sickness, or sorrow were to be shared or lightened. There were few to whom Lord Douglas had been more anxious to show his bride than to this homely cousin, with her long stories and her quaint knack of making untoward speeches.

"I thought you were never coming to see her," he said, as he held Grizel by both hands, when she arrived at Dalbraith in the spring following his marriage.

"And I would have been here sooner, Douglas, with all my heart," she answered, taking his words literally, as was her wont; "much sooner, if I had known you wanted me, but they told me newmarried folk were best left to themselves at first."

Dalbraith had for years been her holiday home. Her long comfortable visits were so managed as to disturb nobody; but she was always to the fore if she was wanted. Her hosts went their way and she hers. The clachan and the manse were full of dear friends; the outlying huts across the moor and the wild sheep farms up the glen, all expected a speedy visit from mistress Grizzy. The farming, the shooting, the fishing of Dalbraith, had from her youth up been among the first interests of her life;

and now she was beginning to be as proud of Margaret's beauty, as if she had chosen her out of all the world herself, to be married, as she would have phrased it, " upon " the young head of her family.

" Isn't the day too lovely? " said Margaret, after Grizel had made her peace with Tam by means of a bit of bannock.

" We are going to have soft weather," answered Grizel, looking with experienced eyes at a thin creeping mist that was touching the hill-tops daintily.

" And Harold will get his fishing," added Douglas, coming down the steps.

" Harold, my eldest brother," explained Margaret; "I wish he was here now, and Winifred too."

" My dear ! " exclaimed Grizel, in a tone of wonder and expostulation. " They that are in London, with the park to drive in, and attending grand festivals like the one you read of in your letter to-day, with the thousands of coloured lamps, and the exotic palm-trees on the stairs, and the band of His Majesty's Grenadier Guards playing dance music all through the night, and you are wishing to have them *here*."

" In this land of moorland and savages," added Douglas.

" I am not a woman of the world, my dear, and I am very thankful myself to be spared the glitter and distraction of a London life; it must surely turn your heads in time, what with the balls, and the conversation, and the admirers—"

Douglas and Margaret laughed.

" Not that they would trouble me, at my time of life especially," went on Grizel; " and I never had any admirers, Margaret, not even when I was a young lass at home. Now I dare say that seems very strange to you, Douglas, my dear? "

"Very strange indeed, Grizzy," said Douglas, patting her shoulder.

"I used to think it rather strange myself, and to wonder a little how it was,—and I never was a favourite with my mother. There were my three sisters, Barbara, and Nicola, and little Phemy, all first favourites; but they were each one taken from her early, either by death or marriage, and only I left with her, poor body, in her old age. That was strange too."

"I would not be understood," she began again, after a moment's thought, "to blame my poor mother for making favourites, though I do reckon it a very sinful thing for a mother to do. I've been told that your mother loves you, Margaret, far beyond your sisters."

"How do you expect Margaret to answer that?" said Douglas with a laugh. "You don't mind dear old Grizzy's speeches, Meg," he added to his wife, as Grizel, still busily talking, walked away with a nod and a smile, and he and Tam and Margaret took their slow way to the river-side.

A few weeks more, and guests from England began, by twos and threes, to gather at Dalbraith. Harold Scrope and his sister Winifred happened, by reason of good post-horses, and no small amount of impatience, to reach Dalbraith a day before they were expected. They arrived on a still August evening, "betwixt the gloaming and the mirk." It was getting late, and indeed the mirk had begun slowly to get the better of the gloaming. Moor and hill were growing softly indistinct, and only a faint glint of silver showed where the burn went tumbling along the glen, as the weary horses breasted the last steep bit of the brae, and then trotted stiffly down towards the house.

The bell by the turret-door was rung; they heard it clanging in the distance; a dog barked; then another echo faintly repeated the sound both of bell and bark; and then everything was silent again. No one came to answer the bell. Only the night air whispered in the willow trees, and some frogs croaked dismally.

"I say, Winifred, this is serious," said Harold, after he and his servant and the driver had set the bell pealing again and again, with no other result than to send the dogs into ecstasies of almost frantic barking. "There is evidently not a soul in the house. Have Meg and Douglas been carried off bodily by a rival clan, or are they taking a moonlight stroll, surrounded by their vassals? Yes, ring away, Maurice, by all means, though there's no one to let us in, that's clear."

"And I am so dreadfully hungry," said Winifred, jumping out of the carriage, and running a few steps backwards, to look up at the dim outline of the house. "No; there's not the glimmer of a light even in the attics."

"Neither in turret nor dungeon," said Harold.

"Nor in kitchen or scullery, which is more to the purpose," added Winifred.

"Nor in the buttery-hutch. I suppose there is a buttery-hutch; there always is in a Scotch house, isn't there?"

"A 'but and a ben' you mean," said Winifred, just as ignorant, and they laughed and walked round to the other side of the house.

Then suddenly there broke upon their ears the sound of bagpipes braying with fury some way off, a noise of voices shouting, and torches were waving and lights shining in the darkness.

"Bedlam broke loose," said Harold, composedly, making towards the lights.

"I hope if Meg is there, she will give us something to eat," responded Winifred.

The mystery was soon cleared up. It was Margaret's birthday, and a gillies' ball was going on.

Margaret, apprised somehow of their arrival, came running to meet them, and Douglas behind her waved a torch over her, showing her to her brother, rosier than he had ever beheld her, and panting slightly.

"You seem blown, Meg," he said, after she had welcomed them both. Winifred was confiding her great hunger to Douglas, and Harold, after a year's absence, had got his arm most comfortably round the waist of this well-beloved sister.

"Yes, that reel was fast and furious. You must come and look at them presently, it is so picturesque."

And so it was. The pipes, that, abuse them as you will, set your heart beating and your feet moving, quicker than any other mortal music, were sending far abroad their wild, piercing, maddening notes; at once a squeal, a wail, a shriek of triumph, a moan, a monotonous hum, and a cataract of dancing, hurrying notes; and blending in or jarring against this music, came the strange guttural shouts and wild cries of the Highland dancers. "Heugh," called the deep voices of the men, and the women answered in shrill chorus, and the stamping feet kept the measure almost as strictly as the bagpipes, while the kilted figures whirled round and round, and the torches went tossing up and down.

"That I should live to see Meg dancing the houlachan in a barn," said Harold Scrope, panting between each word after his own exertions. "Just look at her face now!"

She was not dancing, but standing in the front of an eager circle of spectators, her hand on an old

woman's shoulder, and her eyes fixed on Douglas, who was dancing a sword dance with the village "sutor."

An odd, swift, savage-looking dance it is, as the crossed swords lie gleaming on the floor, and the quick steps, swift as lightning, light as hail-stones, fall around them. Strong, and sure, and rapid were the present dancers, and sudden grunts of approbation or shouts of encouragement reached them on all sides.

"Wonders will never cease," again observed Harold Scrope.

"What an atmosphere that was," he said an hour or so later, drawing a deep breath of pure night air, as he and Margaret stood on the steps of the house. They had just been escorted home, with shouts, and pipes, and waving torches, and Douglas had thanked the people in Gaelic for their hearty good wishes to his wife.

He and Winifred were laughing and searching for lucifer matches in the hall, for no one would dream of returning from the ball for the next three hours, and they had the house to themselves.

"What an atmosphere," repeated Harold.

"I suppose it was rather warm," said Margaret, looking back regretfully.

"Warm, my dear Margaret, with the crowd, and the smoke of the torches, and the steaming whiskey; you do put it very mildly."

"Isn't it lovely now?" she asked, and they both stood and looked up at the sky, deep blue still, and but very faintly spangled with stars, for the lingering daylight of a northern night just tinged the air. The silvery birch-stems glimmered white, like trees in fairy land; the moor stretched away, solemn and broken; and beyond range after range of the great hills rose up black against the purple of the sky.

Margaret clasped her hands together in almost passionate gratitude. "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places," she thought, but she only said aloud—"See, Harold, yonder is the deer forest."

Harold took off his hat and waved it in the direction to which she pointed. "A welcome sight; good luck to you, and won't I be with you soon," he said cheerily, and then growing serious, as Margaret had done, under the still and holy influence of the night, he took her hand in his. "But somehow, Margaret, old woman, I don't seem to mind even about the deer forest, now I have got you back again."

"Douglas and I have lighted the hall," said Winifred, appearing on the threshold, "and I think it's beautiful. Margaret, do come in."

"I must say Meg and her Highlander are not bad to look at," said Harold, the next morning, as he and Winifred stood at the window watching Douglas and Margaret, who were strolling up and down on the grass below. "It reconciles me more to having my nose put out of joint."

He had been his sister's darling when she was at home, and since her marriage she believed herself to have become more devoted to him than ever; but "truth is truth," said the discerning brother, "and the fact is, that Meg can see no one in the world but Douglas."

"I always thought," he continued meditatively, "that when Margaret married—if she ever did find a husband—he would grovel at her feet, but as far as I can see it's rather the other way."

Notwithstanding his deposition from the first place in her affection, Harold was disposed to be enchanted with everything, from the freshness of

the keen mountain air, to the "rude plenty," as he called it, of the proverbial Highland breakfast.

"And for once it's a fine day," he observed, as he closed a substantial meal with oat-cake and heather honey.

"But we have so much sunshine," interrupted Margaret jealously.

"And so much sweet, refreshing rain," added cousin Grizzy.

Harold and Winifred looked at her to see if there was any sarcasm hidden beneath her words; but no, she was evidently in earnest, and was eating her porridge with a kind, happy face. They soon found her out, and learnt to like her, and laugh at her, and be bored by her long stories, as was everybody else.

"It must be pleasant indeed for you to come up here, and find your sister so comfortable and happy," she said to Harold.

They were standing on the steps ready to go out shooting, and Lady Douglas had just been called away. It was not in Harold to make a pretty speech, but he laughed and nodded.

"And I make no doubt," pursued Grizel, "that you fancied she was coming to some sort of a rough place up in the wilds."

"We said so, whether we thought it or not," answered Harold.

"And then, what a surprise for you to find all so perfect at Dalbraith, and your dear sister looking as happy as any Queen; quite different, they tell me, to what she used to look at home."

"Meg wasn't so very miserable after all, at home," said Harold, almost nettled for a minute.

"My dear Malaprop," remonstrated Douglas.

"Eh, Douglas," and she looked at him with round, innocent eyes, "and isn't it always what

I'm telling you, my dear, that you should remember what dear Margaret gave up for you; for Dalbraith is lonesome, Mr. Scrope, very lonesome, especially when the Colonel, Norman Douglas, is away; and just think of all Margaret left behind,—London, Douglas my dear, and balls—"

"Terrible, isn't it?" said Douglas.

"And she the beauty of the family," persisted Grizel, turning to Winifred—"the prettiest of you all beyond compare, they tell me."

"Yes; much the prettiest," answered Winifred, and everybody laughed.

"So tall and grand-looking," said Grizel, folding her hands, and nodding her head complacently. "They were all afraid of her at first—were the silly folk here about. Mistress Maclean, the minister's wife, she came to me, and she says, 'Miss Grizzy, I'm that frightened of her I can't get out my words.' 'My dear, it is but natural in you,' I said; 'it's not what we have been used to in these parts, so different as she is from yourself, and from all of us homely bodies, but you'll get used to her in time, never fear,' I said; and so she has."

"Poor Mistress Maclean," said Harold.

"You were not frightened of Meg, Grizzy," said Douglas.

"Ah, my dear," answered the old cousin, with a smile that lighted up her face; "you see I was like you; I just loved her from the very first."

And then, Colonel Douglas having joined them, the shooting party set off for the moors.

Norman Douglas had been away with his regiment all the winter; he was Lord Douglas's uncle, and had been his guardian, and his leave of absence was always spent at Dalbraith. Of late years, since his ward came of age, he had fashioned a queer

dwelling for himself, in a solitary tower, perched, nobody knew how or why, on the crags overlooking the loch. Whether watch-tower, prison, or fortress, in mediæval times, none of the antiquaries could quite make up their minds. Some people thought it had just been built up there, because the view was so beautiful, looking down on the windings of the glen. However that might be, it had been suffered to fall almost completely into ruins, until Colonel Douglas took it into his head to restore it and to make it his home. Certainly it was an original kind of home; one single room above another for several stories, and a cork-screw staircase—that was the whole. A room or two at the foot of the tower gave Colonel Douglas his smoking-room and study, and he and his soldier servant wanted little more. For there was no lady at the tower—there never would be.

Norman Douglas had waited to marry until he was more than middle-aged, and his wife died early, leaving him a little son, called Kenneth, who was the only outward and visible token that he had ever been aught than an old bachelor. He had the gentle, courteous, slightly formal ways of one, and his unbounded reverence for women was one of his great characteristics. "The essence of chivalry," he used to say, "is respect for women;" and every woman in his eyes was a "princess." In return for his homage all the women with whom he had to do loved him most dearly. There may have been a touch of quaintness given to his character by his hearty regret for the days of romance, and by his lofty sentiments, but there are few people who have inspired more genuine reverence and respect.

His life, though solitary, was not an unhappy one. He had his books, chiefly old chronicles and works

on soldiering, his queer tower, his beloved regiment, one or two great friendships; and, above all, his firm trust and love for the God of his life-long worship, and the faith of his fathers. His creed, it may be, was too simple an one to suit the restlessness of modern thought. An unclouded belief in all the articles of "our glorious religion," to question one of which would have been an act alike of disloyalty and presumption in his eyes—a conviction of the honour and purity of the age of chivalry—a deep satisfaction and pride in the brave old race from which he sprung—these are possibly not the tenets that men commonly hold dearest now-a-days, but they had served him well during a life of many vicissitudes, and they found him in its early autumn a vigorous, high-minded, much-loved man.

He had been so much like a father to Lord Douglas that his influence could be traced in many of his nephew's modes of thought, though the young man belonged of course to a later generation; one more reticent in expressions of feeling, less full of veneration for the past, and of faith in the virtues of ancient blood. "He is a gentleman," quietly spoken by Uncle Norman, with his head in the air, meant that any amount of fortitude, self-sacrifice, and generosity, not to mention courage, was well accounted for by that statement of a simple fact.

Margaret, delighting in him from the first day she knew him, could not resist startling him now and then, shocking his prejudices, and pretending to run down the good old times on which he pinned his faith.

Uncle Norman was half, and only half, alarmed. That Margaret was a bit of a radical Douglas had with great glee announced to him, but she came of a safe old Tory stock, and she might say what

she liked, provided she kept clear of the Stuarts, and was guiltless of any shadow of treason towards Mary, Queen of Scots.

There was one person at Dalbraith, who " princess," in right of her sex, though she must needs be, put his chivalry sorely to the proof, and that was Grizel.

" An inestimable woman is my dear kinswoman Grizzy," he used to say, with a sly gleam of fun in his eyes; " it is impossible to praise her too highly, but just a little—eh, my dear Douglas? you know; just a *leetle* too—yes, you understand."

The truth is that the two were rival story-tellers, and were equally tenacious of their rights as such. Some stories there were which belonged clearly and indisputably to either one or the other. About these both were scrupulously honourable; others —family legends, old chronicles, ghost stories, or the like—belonged to the common stock, and with regard to any such difficulties were pretty certain to occur.

They were never approached without some civil, deprecatory, but very insincere remark.

" Grizel, I make no doubt, would relate the anecdote far better than I can," Colonel Douglas used to begin; or Grizel would break in, " Cousin Norman must know best, and I would not presume to interfere, only it was my own cousin-german's grandfather, on my mother's side, that just chanced to be present when the circumstance took place."

After being thus disturbed, the Colonel would bow with stern courtesy, motioning to his rival to proceed, and Grizel, having effectually spoilt the point of his story, insisted on withdrawing from the contest, neither vouchsafing any attention to the request, that the other would " take up the thread of the narrative." Only one thing was tolerably

sure—that whichever was prevailed upon to begin again, would find his or her discourse broken in upon at the third word.

At Grizel's Highland superstitions Colonel Douglas affected to laugh with gentle superiority; but it is doubtful whether they were not as dear to him as to her in his secret heart. Both believed firmly in second-sight and in witchcraft, and Grizel, at least, was convinced that the "good people" still haunted the Fairy glen.

It was a lovely little gorge, that Fairy glen, winding just under the craig of Norman's Tower, dainty with golden, green, or rose-tinted mosses, and sweet with gale and honeysuckle.

There the gien tree bloomed silvery white in spring, and birken bushes feathered the grey rock; and a hidden spring, the fairy well, laughed up with a bubbling sound of never-ending mirth, where "green grow the rashes."

And where a giddy bridge crossed the deep little glen, there was a dark Prince Charlie's cave. What matter that only Grizel believed the wandering Prince to have once sheltered there? Woe betide the wight that dared to question it before her!

The fairies were much more real personages, for sure it is that even on a summer evening no herd-boy dared to linger in the haunted glen, as he crossed it to "meet his bonnie lassie, when the kye comes hame."

CHAPTER III

THE FOOT OF TIME

"I've seen the smiling of Fortune beguiling,
I've felt all its favours, and found its decay;
Sweet was its blessing, kind its caressing,
But now 'tis fled—fled far away.
I've seen the forest adorned the foremost,
Wi' flowers o' the fairest, maist pleasant and gay;
Sae bonny was their blooming, their scent the air perfuming,
But now they are withered and a' wede away."

On the south side of Loch Dalbraith there stood a long, low, straggling old building, with a garden and an orchard, called the "Lady's Lodge." Thither, for generations past, when the head of the house died, the widowed dames and spinster daughters of Dalbraith had withdrawn into dignified seclusion. In its queer little low rooms many "grannies," and "Auntie Kates," and "Cousin Jeans," had left their faded portraits, and the memory, just as faint, of their harmless and uneventful lives.

The old Lodge had never looked so quaint and pretty as it did now, when its new daintiness of foreign adornment was mixed with the prim furniture of former days. Its present mistress, Lady Beatrix Stuart, had lived for a great part of her life abroad, and was one of those persons who surround themselves naturally with relics. She was born a Douglas, and was the aunt of the late Lord Douglas, and of his brother Norman. When her

husband, Sir James Stuart, left her a widow two or three years before Margaret's marriage, she came back gladly to the shadow of her old home; and her nephew and grand-nephew, Norman Douglas and the young Lord, were alike proud to welcome her.

One has sometimes seen pictures that have misty golden distances, against which figures in the foreground stand out cloudily, with a certain look of shadowy unreality.

Margaret Douglas, in some way, associated Lady Beatrix Stuart with that sort of visionary effect, perhaps because the first time she saw her she was standing in an orchard, the trees of which were in full bloom, and the pink and white blossoms were backed by a pure gold sunset.

Afterwards 'Aunt Beatrix' grew to be a most real and living presence in her daily life; but Margaret always remembered her with her face in shadow, as she saw her that first day, a slight figure, very erect and graceful, clad in a long black gown, the glimmer of a white muslin kerchief crossed over her breast, and the background of apple-blossom and gold.

There was a little golden-haired child clinging to her hand, and trampling on her black dress.

"There," said Norman Douglas, pointing towards her, as he and Margaret and Cousin Grizzy walked up to the Lady's Lodge one spring evening from the boat; "there is Aunt Beatrix, Margaret."

"Out of doors at her age, with nothing but her cap upon her head," said unromantic Grizel.

The boy was Kenneth Douglas, Norman's little son, who had been taken home by his father's aunt in the days following his young mother's death, and had lived with her ever since. He was just

beginning to run alone now. As he stood there, staring gravely at the strange lady who was coming towards him with his father, his sunny hair and fair face matching the sky and the apple-blossoms, he and the old lady made the prettiest contrasted picture of youth and age.

Lady Beatrix was not very old in reality; perhaps only about fifteen years older than her nephew Norman, but in speech and in dress, nay, in everything except in heart, she had long ago turned her back on youth. If there could be affectation in anything belonging to her, it was in the adjustment of the delicate lace "coifs" that she tied under her chin, and which were so arranged as to give her the appearance of a very old woman. Certainly they rather failed in their object; her dark eyes and her smile kept her for ever young, notwithstanding that the hair she wore raised on a cushion under her antique caps, was so white that it looked as if it had been powdered.

It was funny to see the pride that Colonel Douglas took in her. All his life she had been his ideal of perfection, his 'inspiration,' as he expressed it in his little high-flown way.

Lady Beatrix had been well accustomed to be petted and adored by the people who surrounded her; old men and young men had alike fallen under her charm; her old father, her old husband —later on, the one son who used to carry his "little mother" about on his shoulder, and be vainer of her beauty than any of the lovers of her youth.

All these were gone from her now. Charley Stuart was in India, and his "little mother's" heart often trembled for him, because of the fighting going on. Life had heaped trouble on her, but the eyes that had wept so much were bright still,

and the heart fresh and loving. Norman Douglas had in some measure taken the place of the absent son, and Lord Douglas worshipped her. Nothing could be prettier than the way she took their homage,—the bright, soft, tender manner, touched with old-world courtliness, and full of the gaiety and grace that belonged only to herself.

"I want you two to love each other, Margaret," said Colonel Douglas, on the evening of that first visit, while their boat was slowly crossing the loch on its way home. "Some day you must let me tell you all about her."

"I think she looks as if she must have had a story," said Lady Douglas.

"Yes, and so she has; rather a sad one. Did Ronald never tell you of it? I have heard her tell some parts of it myself."

"And so have I, often," said Grizel, pricking up her ears.

"Aye, doubtless, though she seldom speaks of herself. She was but a lassie, Margaret, when her troubles began; only about fifteen."

"Just upon sixteen," put in Grizel.

"Ah, well, yes; just upon sixteen, so I said," continued Norman. "You know she was born and brought up in France, and never left it until the Revolution had begun."

Grizel here struck in again.

"But maybe Margaret has not heard how Aunt Beatrix's father and mother never could bring themselves to leave Paris; indeed, her mother, the French Lady Douglas, never set foot in Scotland, not to mention Dalbraith, until she was driven to it by the troubles in her own country."

"That was just what I was telling Margaret," said Colonel Douglas.

"Ah, but, Cousin Norman, you ought to go back further than that," pleaded Grizel, almost with tears in her eyes. This was one of her own best stories, and it was hard indeed to hear all the first part of it disposed of in this cursory fashion. Properly speaking, the whole genealogy of the Douglases ought to be gone into, to the third and fourth generation. "Indeed you must go back a little further, just to make things clear to poor Margaret. Won't you just mention, that Lady Beatrix's father was born at Saint Germain? It seems to carry one far back, doesn't it, Margaret, to the days of the Stuarts? And she got her name from King James's Italian queen. Yes; her father was born at Saint Germain, and was always more of a Frenchman than a Scotchman, for he was twice married in France. His father had followed King James into exile in the year 1688—"

"Are we to have all the ancestors?" asked Colonel Douglas, with patient sarcasm.

"No, my dear Cousin Norman, no. Indeed, I was only wanting to point out the reason of Aunt Beatrix being rather foreign in her ways, just in her excuse—"

"Excuse!" echoed Colonel Douglas, firing up indignantly.

"For you see," Grizel pursued unheeding, "her father, as I was saying, entered the French service, and when he was quite an elderly man, he married a young French lady for his second wife."

"True. Well, Margaret, her father married a young French wife—"

"Fresh from her convent, poor young thing," again struck in the inextinguishable Grizel. "She was called Mademoiselle Marie Hortense Alexandrine Diane de Beaurepaire," (pronouncing the

long list of French names rather funnily,) "and she was in the flower of her youth, poor little lady, when they took her from her convent, and wedded her to our old grandfather."

"And Beatrix was her daughter," resumed Norman.

"Her second daughter—the eldest, Marie Thérese Félicité, died young—"

"Ah, I believe there was a baby or two who did not live," said Norman, "but that's neither here nor there. Our aunt, Lady Beatrix—"

"You should say, Cousin Norman, that she was always called Lady Beatrix from her childhood, because poor King James had granted her grandfather the old Earldom of Dalbraith, but Kenneth, her brother, never would take the title."

"Would not, or could not," said Norman, smiling; "but somehow, Aunt Beatrix has always kept the 'lady' out of a spirit of loyalty to her father, and to the exiled family."

"But her story?" asked Margaret, striving to avert a discussion on the vexed question of King James's patents of nobility.

"Ah," said Grizel, "you should hear her talk about her young days herself. She tells it so prettily —about the old Hôtel de Beaurepaire in the Faubourg St. Germain, where they used to live with her mother's father, the Marquis de Beaurepaire, up on the fourth story; and then the Château in the forests of La Vendée, which they sometimes went to, and where they were so frightened of the wolves in winter. Her father was getting to be an old man then, (Beatrix was the child of his old age,) and her mother was fond of the world, and spent most of her time at Court. The old hotel in Paris had a courtyard, and a garden with fountains,

and a 'boulingrin,' where little Beatrix used to play—"

"Never mind about all that now, Grizel," interposed Colonel Douglas. "I want to tell Margaret about René de Beaurepaire."

"He was with the army until Beatrix was fifteen. She never saw him," said Grizel, unable to refrain herself.

Who does not know the natural impulse to catch the reins out of a driver's hands when a horse is running away? It was almost as difficult to Grizel to resist trying to keep back the telling of this story, which was getting on so much too fast. There was such a "pretty" bit which ought to come in here, about the little girl's life in the garden of the old Hôtel, playing bowls with the old father who doted upon her, and learning her lessons from her noble *dévote* grandmother, Madame de Beaurepaire, for whom there remained so sad a fate in store.

But Norman had got his turn now.

"René was her cousin, and soon after he came back to Paris from the army, as Grizel says, he asked his uncle to let him be betrothed to his little Scottish kinswoman. It was all arranged in the formal French fashion; but René had fallen desperately in love, and she—well, I suppose she was very fond of him, but, as she says herself, she was only a child, ready to be charmed with the first handsome young face that looked kindly at her. Well, to make a long story short—"

"Oh, Cousin Norman," broke reproachfully from Grizel.

"To make a long story short," repeated Colonel Douglas, firmly, "the storm was gathering darkly over France, and already the emigration had begun. Nothing would induce the old Marquis de Beaurepaire to leave Paris, and the Douglases stayed until

nearly the last, but in the end it was thought right that they should go to Scotland, and they came home to Dalbraith; René coming with them to take care of them on the journey, for the old Lord was getting very infirm.

"Many years before that time he had sent home his only son Kenneth to look after poor deserted Dalbraith, and to send him what scanty rents he could collect, to Paris. And Kenneth took kindly to the old country, and was married—"

"Upon Alison, one of the Colquhouns of Erlistoun," said Grizel. "He was a thorough Scot, Norman, was your worthy father, Kenneth Douglas."

"And so was his wife," continued Norman, with a smile; "very Scotch indeed. Therefore it was a new experience to the French lady, who came straight from Versailles. But she was courageous and gay, like most of the *émigrés*, and ready to make the best of things, except when she thought of the old father and mother she had left to meet the storm alone. I was little more than a baby then, but Sholto, my eldest brother, well remembers their all arriving at Dalbraith, and the winsome little foreign lassie who turned the heads of all the sober Scotchmen hereabouts, and whom he used to call his 'wee auntie.'

"René de Beaurepaire, as I have said, escorted them to Scotland, but he did not stay long, for things looked blacker and blacker in France, and the Reign of Terror was beginning. He went back to try and save his uncle. There must have been a great deal that was good in him, but Beatrix, I imagine, was too young to care for him as he did for her. She liked to laugh and talk with him, but she hardly knew what it all meant, only she had the same kindly, loving nature then as now, and she

wanted to see every one that came near her looking happy. It went much deeper with him, poor fellow."

"Ah," said Grizel, "I have heard that he used to say she was a cruel person to love, and he was always wanting more from her than the child knew how to give."

"His was not the right kind of love," pursued Colonel Douglas. "It made him selfish and jealous. Am I tiring you with this long story, Margaret? I would not tell it you but that I think you ought to know the annals of our house."

"I would willingly relieve you of the trouble," said Grizel, her eyes glistening with hope.

But Colonel Douglas resumed his history hurriedly, and made no more apologies. "When it came to René's leaving Dalbraith to go back to France, he must have completely lost his head, I take it. He would have married Beatrix before he started if he could, without her father and mother's consent, or her own either; but as that was impossible, he made a very cruel bargain with her. Seeing him so miserable, and being very unhappy herself at his going back into great danger, she was ready to promise whatever he pleased; and this was the compact to which he bound the poor ignorant child—that come what might, she was to wait ten years for him. Even if he was killed (as was most probable), she was not to marry any one for ten years. It was a wicked thing to ask of her, for he knew he was going back to almost certain death—and she knew it too, so that there was nothing she would not have been ready to do for him just then. I believe she offered to bind herself never to marry at all; but he had just grace enough left not to accept that; only, living or dead, those ten years of

her life must, he said, belong to him. So she gave her word, and he went back to Paris in the height of the 'Terror.' There was not a very long time to wait for tidings of him. He was too late to save his people. The Marquis de Beaurepaire was dead already, and he saw the noble old Marquise guillotined before his eyes, on the day that he met his own fate. Beatrix heard of it all on her seventeenth birthday, so you see her troubles began early."

"It was fine of René to go back to Paris," said Margaret.

"He was a gentleman," answered Colonel Douglas quietly.

"But it was hard on poor Beatrix," observed Grizel, taking advantage of her cousin's emphatic pause. "She was so unhappy that it was very easy for her at first to keep her promise—indeed, no one knew at that time that she had made it; but later on, her father and mother found it out, and she had a great deal to put up with. Naturally, they were indignant at her having been made to give such a promise, and everybody set to work to persuade her that it was not a binding one on her—but it was very little use their talking. They might have saved their breath to cool their porridge."

"It would have been hard," said Colonel Douglas, loftily, "to make a loyal nature such at hers break faith with the dead man who had loved her. But let me go on. Well, a year or two afterwards they took her to Edinburgh, when the French Princes were living at Holyrood; and there she had plenty of admirers, but she never gave one of them a hope or a smile."

"Until"—interposed Grizel.

Colonel Douglas held up his hand. "Aye, indeed, until," he continued, "a year later the poor child

met her fate. *L'histoire se répéte*, Margaret—it was a Frenchman again—another cousin, another Beaurepaire. But this was a very different man from poor René—the passionate, wayward, unformed youth, whose love had ever been a sort of burden to her. Raoul was a more distant cousin; he was a tried soldier, and one of the most accomplished gentlemen of his time. Moreover, he possessed the sort of prestige, in the eyes of Beatrix's mother, of having become the head of her family since the tragedies in Paris. He had been away from France, fighting with the allied armies for several years, and now he came to Edinburgh to pay his *devoirs* at Holyrood, and to lose his heart, hopelessly and utterly, to Beatrix Douglas. Poor Beatrix!—struggle as she would, and as she did, she was powerless to help herself. The new love was too much for her. The young Marquis de Beaurepaire would take no denial; he came back to her again and again. She implored her parents to take her away from Edinburgh, but he followed her to the Highlands; I suppose he saw that hide it as she would, it nearly broke her heart to say him nay; and every one of her people was on his side. Well, well, it was all past and done with years and years ago, long before you were born or thought of, Margaret; but it is one of those circumstances that one cannot help looking back to with a great deal of regret—that marriage would have made so many happy, and I believe Raoul might have been a good man, and a great man, if he had married her then. As it was, it only looks to us as if it had spoilt his life and hers: but how do we know?—blind mortals as we are."

"You are getting on over fast again, Colonel Norman," said Grizel, warningly; and as she spoke the boat grated on the gravel of the beach.

And while Norman and Grizel were struggling who should tell most of her story, Lady Beatrix herself sat by the window where they had left her, and watched their boat on its way across the loch. Before her eyes—for she lived now greatly in the past—there rose pictures of many days that were long gone by. It would have been very strange to her, if she could have overheard the talk in the boat, and listened to those faint descriptions of scenes that were to her as vivid—nay, it might well be more vivid—than the events of yesterday. It would have been strange to hear them touch so lightly the past troubles—guess at the struggle and perplexity that had once rent her life. They guessed, and she remembered, and the past lay dead and buried. They, smiling, told her story. She lived it over again, with its lost faces and silent voices, its laughter and sunshine, its smiles and bitter tears. It is not given to all to bind the past to the present by a strong and enduring cord. Many, as the years slip on, drop the thread of memory from careless or from busy fingers; but Lady Beatrix always held it fast. To-day it seemed as if she was spinning it afresh, because a new touch had been laid upon the web; and seeing Margaret Douglas for the first time at Dalbraith, reminded her of her own young days, and of her coming as a stranger and a foreigner to the home of her forefathers.

Even now she smiled as she recalled the meeting between her mother, with her air of the *vieille cour*, and the homely Scottish gentlewoman whom her step-son, Kenneth Douglas, had married—the Versailles curtseys, the formal grace, and the well-turned speeches, on the one hand, and the quaint, stiff, but genuine kindliness of welcome on the other.

Lord Douglas, for all his life-long exile, had a warm corner for the Highlands in his heart. He had not been at Dalbraith since the year '45, when as a boy he paid it a brief and secret visit, on his way back to Paris, after the 'cause' had been lost at Culloden. Beatrix could see him now, with his hand on his heart, shivering a little in the mist-laden air, and apostrophising *ma patrie*.

Just as plainly she remembered her mother's gesture, the shrug and shudder with which she gathered her draperies round her, and the almost tragic sweep of the arm as she pointed out of the window towards the wilderness.

To Beatrix herself it was all as the realization of a dream; it was a wilderness, true, but a wilderness that blossomed for her as a rose. Long since, in the now-deserted gardens of the Hôtel de Beaurepaire, her father used to tell her wondrous tales of the land of rushing streams and blue mountains that her grandfather had renounced to follow his king.

It was a strange fate, mused Lady Beatrix, that had linked her, both on her father's side and on her mother's, to the faithful followers of a fallen dynasty.

As a child she had caught from her father a spark of his romantic and chivalrous devotion to the House of Stuart. And now her mother's love for her own sovereigns was deepening into a mournful passion of loyalty that was almost a religion.

Yes; those were days that printed their traces deeply on the girl's whole life, and made of Dalbraith a haunted place, peopled with the memories of her youth.

It was at Dalbraith, on a never-to-be-forgotten winter's day that the tidings reached them of Louis the Sixteenth's death. It was by the loch-side that

René de Beaurepaire, on the eve of his desperate journey to Paris, wrung from her, in his stormy love and jealousy, the promise that wrought her much evil, and altered the whole current of her life. A wild March evening; a red sunset; pines tossing in the wind; a grey sheet of ruffled water, touched here and there by crimson gleams—these would for ever after bring back to her the passionate pleading of his voice, the heart-ache of that parting.

And yet she loved Dalbraith—loved it more and more when the coy northern spring peeped shyly over the hill-tops, even though with the summer came the ending of suspense, and the seal of a terrible certainty was set upon their fears.

There followed in her memory a long peaceful time—a time that grew, almost against her will, to be a very happy time. She used to reproach herself then, that her young heart would grow light again. Later, she thanked God for it, as one is thankful, after a stormy night, for the cool, fresh morning hours before the heat and burden of the day.

"That was my play-time, the only one I ever had," she said, long afterwards. And so with the two 'laddies,' her nephews, as companions, among the dogs, and the ponies, and the boats, upon the heather hills, and by the moorland tarns, Beatrix bade a merry, unconscious farewell to the days of her childhood.

Only too soon came Edinburgh—the sad little mockery of a court at Holyrood, which, however, she loved from the first, because the sound of the French voices brought back a smile to her mother's face—Edinburgh, with its balls and assemblies; and by-and-by the strange light that dawned upon her frightened her, it was so strong and bright, and made her heart beat so heavily.

Raoul de Beaurepaire!—the one love, the joy, the sorrow of her life. Ah! they might say he was her fate—they might look on at her sore struggle, confusing her with conflicting advice, or with loving entreaties, but to no one could she ever tell what the battle had cost her. For he, Raoul, treated the old engagement very lightly, and would have had her break faith with her dead cousin—would have had her lay aside the ill-starred promise, which already she owned, with a pang of bitter self-reproach, she had broken in her heart. And when he found he could not prevail with her—when again and again she bade him leave her, and at last she had forced him to believe that she was in earnest—he declared that he was ready to wait for her all the seven years that remained of her promise, as Jacob waited for his Rachel, counting them but as one day, for the love he bore her. They had gone back to Dalbraith ere this, and he followed her there, and would not be denied.

Her father was growing very old and feeble, and he longed greatly to see the child of his old age happy and provided for before he died. Her mother —ah! was it not enough for her that Raoul was a Frenchman?—and had he not bribed her with stories of the old ancestral château, standing deep in the woods of loyal La Vendée, which the tide of the Revolution had never reached, and where 'Mademoiselle Marie' was still affectionately remembered.

Beatrix could not meet her mother's wistful eyes; Lord Douglas's wishes sank deep into her heart, and Raoul held her hand, and looked into her eyes, as if she held his very life to give or to withhold. By this time, also, it seemed as if her whole being was merged into one wish, one thought, one prayer, that she might do him good and not evil all the days of

her life. God's answer to that prayer remains a mystery—it was a very bitter one to her for many years, but at last she grew content—willing to leave the riddle to be read aright at the lifting of the veil.

"Not for seven years," said Beatrix, at last. "Remember, not for seven years;" but before she ended, Raoul was kneeling at her feet as if she had granted him all, in granting him this hope.

So, on a summer's day, they betrothed her for the second time in the hall at Dalbraith. How clearly she remembered it. Raoul's exulting smile, her father's joy, and the weight on her own heart. And then following, alas! how closely, came the gentle and peaceful closing of the old man's eyes.

Well, those seven years were lived through—endless as they seemed to look forward to—lived through hour by hour, month by month, year by year, at last. Raoul and Beatrix met sometimes, but not very often. Monsieur de Beaurepaire had rejoined the army soon after the death of Lord Douglas, and Beatrix went abroad with her mother, who was pining away in Scotland from home-sickness, the pathetic complaint of the exile. They went to Aix-la-Chapelle, and afterwards to Switzerland, leading a wandering and somewhat melancholy life among people who were exiles like themselves. Whenever it was possible, Raoul joined them, but those meetings brought only a pleasure to Beatrix which was largely mingled with pain. She saw that the waiting, weary enough for a brave and patient nature like her own, was still worse for him than it was for her, and that it was doing him real harm. Sometimes he beset her with passionate prayers that she would release herself and him from their long bondage to her promise, and save him from the intolerable weariness of his life. A man, he told her,

was not like a woman, to whom endurance and submission were natural.

Sometimes he was very gentle—satisfied, and made happy only by her presence; and when he left her, looking at her with a sad wistfulness that went nearer to shaking poor Beatrix's resolution than anything else in the world.

But through everything she never lost her hopefulness, or the bright sweetness that brought her love wherever she went.

And, after all, she was not called upon to wait those seven years. The end came when nearly six of them were gone. She and her mother had returned for a while to Dalbraith, where indeed all the great events of her life, whether for joy or for sorrow, seem to have come to her. She was beginning to think that the summer of her life was drawing near, that the long anguish of patience was nearly over, and that it might be given to her to make Raoul forget the past in the happiness of the present. She had not seen him for some months, but her brother had written to him now and had asked him to join them at Dalbraith.

Directly they met, she saw that he was changed. Perhaps he had not fully realised it himself; perhaps he had intended to hide it from her, but she knew him too well for that to be possible.

It was all told the first time they were alone together, in the abrupt, reproachful words: "Beatrix, it was too much to ask of any man. I could not do it."

Then she knew—it seemed to her as if she had always known that so it must be. She spoke very gently, putting her hand on his arm as he paced restlessly up and down. She only said, "Yes, dear Raoul; I think it was too much."

"Oh, Beatrix, we might have been so happy. Beatrix, indeed it is your fault."

She sighed a little, but her eyes had not lost their trustful look as she raised them to his. "Was it my fault, Raoul? I don't know; but I am quite sure it was not yours."

"You don't know what you are talking about," he answered restlessly. "You don't understand."

"I think I do. I think we can put it right."

He shook his head, but he put his hand down on hers, which still lay upon his arm, and as he did so his eyes fell on the ring which he had put on her finger in her father's presence nearly seven years ago. "Right! oh, Beatrix," he said, with a low groan, "how can anything ever be right again?"

Beatrix stood thinking for a moment, and then she drew off the ring, and held it towards him. "If I send this ring to some one, with my love—then, Raoul?" and she looked up at him with a smile.

He bent down his head, and made no answer.

"Who is it, Raoul?" she asked presently, in a low, soft voice.

He looked up and caught her hands in his, drawing her to him roughly, with a strange passion of tenderness, and anger, and regret in his face.

"She is not like you, Beatrix, I know that; and yet I cannot help myself."

And in that sentence lay the key to the remainder of his life. It was not a good or a very happy one. He knew always that he had fallen short of his high hope, that he had placed his love a second time less nobly and purely than the first. Perhaps he was not a strong man, and that, as he said, he could not help himself. His fancy had only wavered for the moment. The glamour that had blinded his eyes soon faded, and it left him a gloomy and embittered

man. To the last he remembered Beatrix; and those who were by him on his deathbed (for he died early), said that they could hear him whispering her name.

"Those Beaurepaires are always being thrown against us, for good or for evil," said Lord Douglas to his wife, when she told him that she had been hearing about Lady Beatrix's early life. "I really have a sort of superstition about it. It was a Beaurepaire, Margaret, who introduced us to each other—René de Beaurepaire—don't you remember?"

"The son of this man?" asked Margaret.

"Yes; Raoul's son. He is sure to turn up here sooner or later, for he is devoted to Aunt Beatrix, who was good to him after his father died, and to Uncle Norman too."

"And to you, Ronald," added Margaret, jealously. "You who nursed him so devotedly when he was ill."

"Ah well, Meg, I was not without my reward for that piece of business, so we won't say anything more about it. And now, which do you think tells a story best—Grizzy or Uncle Norman?"

CHAPTER IV

AS MORNING SHOWS THE DAY

" Though Fortune be saucy, and dourty, and dour,
And gloom thro' her fingers like hills thro' a shower,
When bodies hae got ae bit bairn o' their ain,
How he cheers up their hearts—he's the wonderfu' wean."

It was in the second year of their marriage that Ronald, their only son, was born to Douglas and Margaret. Life dawned on him when the bloom was on the heather, and the moors were in their glory.

With the Highland superstition that sees an omen in everything, the old wives about the place used to tell long afterwards, what a bonny morning of sunshine and glittering dewdrops was the forenoon of his birthday. But before twelve o'clock—quite early —the sky clouded over, and a heavy storm broke over the bright young day. The nurse shook her head at Grizel across the cradle, but young Ronald lay peacefully absorbed in trying to swallow his fist, and was alike indifferent to the evil presage, and to the grave, deep, thunder-claps that rolled above his head.

They never called him Baby after he was christened. To his father and mother he was Ronald, or more generally Rollo; to every one else about him, the ' wee bit Master.'

In truth his babyhood was somewhat slurred and hurried over, so anxious were all his belongings

that he should early prove himself to be 'a man.' The dignity of his position as a 'lad bairn' was impressed very soon upon his mind, and little Ronald's baby efforts to act up to what he felt was expected from him were sometimes pretty, sometimes almost pitiful to see. And yet it was rather a pity to hasten, with impatient feet, over that little opening bit of the path of life, upon which, after all, there is no return. It has its own simple, foolish charm, and the tottering footsteps beat out a tender, irregular music, that is wanting later on, in the steady tramp of the trained soldier marching to his battle.

Margaret Douglas rejoiced over her little son, wondered at him, watched him for hours, dreamt about his future, but she did not very often toss him in her arms, or sing him nursery rhymes, and the coaxing nonsense that comes naturally to most young mothers would have sounded strange on her lips. Rollo himself taught her some 'little ways' in time; she learnt from him to play at 'peep-bo,' and to pretend Rollo was lost, searching for him in all impossible places, while he sat in full view, shouting with laughter on the sofa. Where once she had an idea she carried it out energetically, but the baby mostly took the initiative himself, blew the kisses, and bestowed, unasked, the romping hugs that are usually received as such un-exampled favours at the hands of a young crown prince.

"I think he really must be an unusually beautiful child," wrote Lady Douglas to her mother. "Every one thinks so; even I never saw a child the least like him, and you know I am not a baby-lover; so it must be true."

As for Lord Douglas, he treated the new-comer after the fashion of most young fathers. For the first few weeks he was very much occupied with

"it"—(that he should have called the wee bundle of cambric and flannel "it" was a sore trial to cousin Grizzy and the nurse). He held it in his arms, whistled to it, warmed its pink curling toes at the fire, and declared that it knew him quite well, and liked him. The nurses looked on in admiration, and Margaret quite believed that "the boy" must like his father better than any one else.

Then began the shooting season. One evening Douglas put the little one down into his cot, with many professions of devoted love. He was out by starlight the next morning, had a grand day's deer-stalking, and, coming home happy and sleepy, forgot the baby for that night, and for many a one besides. "I like to know that he is all right, poor little chap, but I haven't time to go upstairs just now, you know, Margaret," he said, apologetically; but Margaret did not need excuses; her king could do no wrong, and she had only wondered a little bit hitherto at his devotion to the little boy.

A terrible rivalry existed between Ronald's nurse and the French '*bonne*' of little Kenneth, Norman Douglas's small son. Kenneth had a year the start of his little cousin, but, according to his proud Marie, he had cut his first tooth, 'felt his legs,' and begun to talk quite plain, at least a month younger than Ronald could be said to have accomplished any of these feats. Ronald was big and deliberate, and took his time about everything. However, at last the day came when he said "Daddy" so distinctly that nobody could mistake the word. He was then only a quarter of an inch shorter than Kenneth, and Lord Douglas had taken him for a walk. Marie hid her diminished head.

After that first walk Lord Douglas used often to take his son about with him. Ronald did his

very best to keep up, grasping his father's finger tightly, but one of Douglas's long strides generally ended in the little fellow's measuring his length on the ground. To do Ronald justice, he did not cry, however hard the bump may have been. To be a man at each crisis of his small life was his earnest endeavour, and his father was his model. Not to cry when he hurt himself, to be afraid of nothing, to speak the truth, and love his mother, were the boy's notions of manliness, gathered partly from the exhortations addressed to him, and partly from a careful study of his father's bearing. In fact, as time went on, the little Master of Dalbraith stood a good chance of being hardened off the face of the earth altogether, by the stern theories of his young father and mother. If he showed the least symptom of fear—and people are not heroes at three years old—Lord Douglas looked infinitely puzzled, and Lady Douglas sorrowfully indignant.

The helplessness of childhood was really as sacred to Lord Douglas as it is to most strong men, but he was slow to recognize its extent. Nothing could be more tender than his way of carrying and comforting the little fellow, if he was really in difficulties; and yet Rollo, being a sturdy child, of independent nature, often struggled through a considerable amount of cold and weariness, rather than complain to his father.

He grew up a thorough little mountaineer, fearless and hardy. Happy are they who can look back upon a boyhood such as his, as simple, pure, and brave.

Those were years of scarcity and great want in the Highlands, and the sufferings of his people sank deep into the heart of Lord Douglas. There were no luxuries in those days at Dalbraith. The

inmates lived frugally, even poorly, both Lord Douglas and his wife giving up their whole lives to lighten, as far as in them lay, the terrible want and misery that was around them. It was a grim battle that they had to wage with famine and despair; but it was fought on their side with unfaltering courage, strong will, and cheerful self-denial. There was nothing in the world that Douglas would not have given up to help his people, and Margaret seconded him with might and main. They never lost heart, even at the worst of times—that little band of workers, Douglas, and his wife, and Norman —only once or twice Douglas's courage well nigh gave way, and that was when it was first found necessary that some of the Highlanders should emigrate to Canada.

That nearly broke him down. The brave, patient people, who had met starvation with a dignified submission, whose hearts clung with so passionate a love to their glens and shielings, whose fathers, from time immemorial, had lived and died among the hills and moors of their own romantic land;— that they should have to leave it all, and go forth into exile! To them it was as the bitterness of death; to Douglas, for them, a grief that he could hardly master or overcome.

Margaret never forgot the sorrow of the time when the emigrants were getting ready to leave Scotland. Douglas had done his duty; he had urged their going, but now he had to stand by and see the sacrifice carried out. His brief words, his troubled sleep and contracted brow, showed what he was feeling. Several bands had left the surrounding country before any of his own people could make up their minds to go out into the new world beyond the sea. But they knew that it must come to that.

One day Margaret had ridden with her husband many miles up into the hills, that he might bid farewell to a departing family—not from his own property. Those leave-takings were cruel work, but Douglas would not shrink from one of them; not to save himself a little pain would he let the people go away unnoticed; they should carry with them, at least, the memory of a few words of hope and of goodwill. But that day they were too late; the shepherd and his family whom they had come to seek, were already gone.

The hut was silent and deserted; no children were playing round the door, no sheep-dog's bark was heard in welcome or in warning. On the hearth in the middle of the floor were the dying peats of a fast fading fire—a heap of ashes—a faint canopy of smoke.

The door stood wide open, and the wind swept into the empty dwelling with a sigh, fluttering the bit of checked blue and white curtain that hung above the window, and shaking the rude latch of the closed door that led "ben." A broken bird-cage hung in the unglazed window, but its door was open too, and the bird was gone. It was a dark and dreary-looking hut enough, but once it was a home.

Douglas stood looking round him for a few minutes, the silence and the desolation creeping coldly over his heart. He sat down on a broken wooden stool, beside the smouldering peats on the hearth-stone that was growing cold, and, covering his face with his hands, groaned aloud.

And then his own people began to go. It was better for them, there was no gainsaying that; hope and plenty awaited them out there; but in the mean time a few hearts got broken on the way.

They came in a sort of rough procession to Dalbraith, that Lord Douglas might "set" them on their journey—a troop of gaunt, famine-stricken men and women, with despair and hope striving for mastery in their hearts. It was sad to watch them come winding down the mountain side, with their pipers playing a pibroch that echoed for the last time through the glen they were leaving.

There were old men and babies among them, women and little children. And such partings! Here and there a few words muttered in Gaelic, as the strong hands wrenched themselves asunder; wild sobs from the departing women; a scream sometimes from an old grandmother left behind. And beside such an one Lady Beatrix was generally to be found, holding the poor convulsed hands in hers, weeping bitterly with her, but withal speaking brave words of tender cheer, about the meeting again that was to be soon in "the Land o' the Leal."

Douglas went over to Canada with the first band of his people. He could not bear to let them go out alone. When he had seen them settled, and in a fair way to do well, he came home somewhat comforted. There was hard work to be done still, but there was also now more hope. Years, however, like those he had gone through leave their mark for ever on a man's life. He had grown stronger and at the same time gentler and more humble, as in that sharp ordeal he had learnt that none can lead a true life without the help of God.

While he was away Margaret remained at Dalbraith, trying, with Grizel's help, to carry on her husband's work, and waiting with what patience she might for his return. The time seemed to her to drag terribly. She envied Grizel's busy contentment, and wondered at the unfailing brightness of

Lady Beatrix, sometimes speculating, half idly, on how she herself could have borne such sorrows as all through her life had followed in the footsteps of her husband's aunt. How impossible, she thought, ever to smile again. "But I could not live without Ronald," she said to herself; "I should die."

Even now a shadow, that was only half confessed, had fallen over the Lady's Lodge. A little grandchild, Marion Stuart by name, had come there, sent home from India to the care of Lady Beatrix, and the small maiden brought with her a heavy disappointment. For there had been great hopes that her father—the only child of his mother—was himself coming home on leave to gladden her eyes once more. No one knew how Lady Beatrix had built on this meeting—how she had pined to see Charley's honest blue eyes, and to hear his voice again—how often lately she had lain awake with a beating heart, too happy and too full of hope to sleep.

And the blissful vision was so nearly coming true. Then alas! there had been some disturbances on an Indian frontier, Charley's regiment was ordered there, his leave postponed, and the little daughter was sent home to Scotland in the care of a brother officer's wife. It was a bitter disappointment, and perhaps the worst part of it was that Charley believed so fully that he was sending his mother by far the dearest, and the most welcome, part of himself. How dense people are sometimes, even the best and kindest! "When you have our little rosebud on your lap, mother, you will not have time," he wrote, "to miss your own old boy."

His mother shook her head, cried over the letter, smiled, brushed away the tears, and kissed Charley's

dear blundering handwriting. "How little the boy knows, God bless him," she said to herself, while she tried to smother the heartache, and to forget the sharp sting of an unshared disappointment. Truly Charley's "rosebud" seemed beset with thorns.

"How pleasurable," said Grizel, "for the dear Auntie to have Charley's child to take his place in her heart," and Lady Beatrix smiled and brightened, striving to put away the haunting sense of contrast; but she could not help thinking of Charley's manly face, his kind voice, of the strong protecting clasp in which she always felt so safe and so happy, and her eyes brimmed over until a tear fell on the fair head of Charley's little child. How glad he would have been—how much they would have had to say to one another; she remembered long firelight talks, and little old jokes shared between mother and son that no one else could ever have entered into, and she almost fancied she could hear his quick step coming in, and his cheery laugh of pleasure.

Instead, on that first day she was holding close to her side a little silent bashful maiden of two summers, whose heart she could feel fluttering under her hand like an imprisoned bird. Little Marion did not cry, but her dumb agony of shyness was almost more painful to see than tears. She met all her grandmother's tender advances by burying her face in her hands, and sometimes stamping her tiny foot on the floor with an air of heartrending despair.

Lady Beatrix was at her wits' end. The little one's genuine suffering cut her to the heart; and then the blue eyes that she had just caught a glimpse of were so like Charley's, it had given her a strange thrill to meet them, and she could almost have

cried because Charley's child would have nothing to say to her.

At last the small thing, after endless coaxing, had allowed herself to be lifted on to her grandmother's knee. Lady Beatrix's heart quite throbbed. The little hands were still tightly clasped over the eyes, and the head bent down; but it was something that she sat still, and allowed the soft hand to hold her small bare leg without kicking it away as she had done hitherto.

Just then the door was suddenly burst open, and Lady Beatrix gave up all for lost, as her other ward, little Kenneth Douglas, rushed noisily into the room.

"What's that?" he asked, in a shout of surprise, as he caught sight of the little drooping figure on Lady Beatrix's lap.

"Hush, Kenneth," she answered softly; "don't frighten her, take no notice, it is little Marion."

Kenneth came quite close, putting his hands behind his back, and staring at his small cousin at his ease.

"What has she got her fists in her eyes for?" he inquired.

"Don't talk so loud, Kenneth; she is shy."

"She is peeping at me all the time. I say, little baby," and he seized hold roughly of the wee leg that Lady Beatrix was touching as if it was made of egg-shell china.

"Kenneth, Kenneth, you will make her cry."

Not at all. To her grandmother's surprise, the little maiden slowly raised her head, and a shy sunny smile stole over her face.

"A boy," she said, slowly and distinctly.

"Yes," answered Lady Beatrix, hardly daring yet to speak above her breath; "a boy. Do you like him, Marion?"

No answer.

"She's dreadfully small, littler than Ronald;" and with an air of lordly indifference Kenneth strolled off to the window.

Marion looked after him, twisted herself suddenly off Lady Beatrix's lap, and trotted across the room.

"Boy," she said, insinuatingly planting herself in front of him.

Kenneth did not mean to be unkind, but he had got his most precious possession, a toy frigate in full sail, in his arms, and the little hands were stretched out alarmingly near to the fragile masts. He gave a friendly push intended to keep her off, but the little one was not very steady on her legs; she made one or two steps backwards and subsided on to the floor.

There was a moment's pause, while Lady Beatrix waited for the scream that must now surely come. Instead, however, there rung suddenly through the room the pretty silver peal of a baby's laugh. Little Marion had taken it all in good part.

"Aden," she said, struggling to her feet, and approaching Kenneth.

"Aunt Beatrix," said the boy solemnly, "she loves me very much indeed."

When Marion went up to her strange nursery that night, she would not look at Lady Beatrix, but she was grasping "Boy's" arm tightly, and a light had arisen on her desolation.

"Aunt Beatrix," said Kenneth, that same evening, after he had said his prayers, and he fixed his eyes steadily on his aunt's face, reading its wistfulness with the quick intuition of childhood, "Are you sorry because that baby likes me better than you?"

"Oh, no, Kenneth, not if it makes her happy."

"I don't think she likes you very much," continued Master Kenneth.

"Perhaps she will by-and-by."

"As much as me?" he asked.

"We shall see."

"Aunt Beatrix," resumed the boy, going on with his own train of thought; "Father says that God loves you very much."

Strange power wielded by baby hands. A child's frown may have the power to wound; a child's unconscious words can heal and bless.

Lady Beatrix took the curly golden head between her hands and kissed it; "I know it, Kenneth," she said, softly and gladly.

Only Margaret Douglas seemed at all to understand the silent trial and disappointment. "That little mite," she said, the first time she saw Marion, and heard Grizel discoursing on the delight and satisfaction she must have brought to her grandmother. And with a caressing gesture, that was very rare in her, she took Lady Beatrix's hand and held it closely in her own. The other glanced up with a quick smile of understanding and thanks for the unspoken sympathy; but presently, as if her heart smote her even for accepting it, her left hand went out, and gently sought little Marion's fair head.

Time passed on; the three children left infancy behind them, and began to play their small parts in the family history. The girl was a sturdy, earnest, meditative little thing, possessed of a wonderful imagination, and of a tremendous power of hero worship. At present all this was lavished on her cousin Kenneth, whose hazel eyes and coaxing ways carried all before him.

How Marion loved him, with his winning tongue and merry laugh, and all that she felt for him in the silence of that deep little heart of hers, she her-

self would certainly not have been able to describe; but she had unutterable day-dreams about herself and him, in most of which she was to have the joy of saving him from misfortune, and sometimes of having her head cut off for his sake. Quiet and self-contained when left to herself, she kindled into life, and glee, and bustle, when her hero was with her. She was the leader in their adventures; sometimes, truth to tell, his defender in danger.

There was a certain formidable-looking mountain goat, which had long been kept in captivity at Dalbraith. Notwithstanding his long beard and twisted horns, he was generally a peaceable animal enough, but one day, when the children had been teazing him rather too much for his good humour, he suddenly broke the cord that tethered him, lowered his head, and charged the whole party gallantly. Kenneth and Ronald sought an inglorious safety in flight; but Marion spread out the skirt of her little frock, and bravely put herself in the forefront of the danger, retiring slowly with her face to the foe, and covering the retreat of the two boys. Lord Douglas came upon the scene just in time to pick up the little maiden as she was being rolled over and over on the grass, and to carry her home on his shoulder, where she sat perched up, shy and serious, and chiefly concerned that he should in no way suppose Kenneth to have been at all wanting in valour. "He had not got a petticoat to catch the goat, you see," said Marion.

Presently they met the two boys coming back, and followed by Lady Beatrix. Kenneth came running to meet them, laughing, and calling out that he hoped good little Moll had not been hurt. Ronald, for his part, kept rather in the back-ground, hanging down his head when he saw his father,

while his little brown face was dyed with the deepest crimson.

"Here, Granny," said Lord Douglas, as he lifted Marion from his shoulder; "your lassie is braver than both our laddies put together."

"Bide a wee," answered Lady Beatrix, pointing back, with a smile, to poor Ronald's shame-stricken little figure, "there's no lack of mettle there."

In truth, Ronald had not dreamt of running away from the goat until he was infected by Kenneth's panic.

Such things are catching, as we all know, by many a sad war history. Instead of showing fight, as he had been preparing to do, he was demoralised by his cousin's disappearance; and the danger appearing imminent, scoured away after him as fast as his short legs could carry him.

Lord Douglas looked at his little son's scarlet face; and presently, sitting down on a rock hard by, lifted him on to his knee.

"Why did you run away?" he whispered, holding him against his breast.

"I was frightened," answered the boy, choking with shame, but perfectly truthful.

Lord Douglas put his cheek down on to the curly head, and said no more; but something—some understanding—some tie—what was it? tightened between father and son, and never got loose again.

The two children at the Lady's Lodge were as happy as are flowers in the sunshine.

"Granny," as they both called her, was the centre of their lives; her gift of sympathy with childhood enabling her to enter into and enjoy, for her own sake, many of the things which they liked best.

Often quaint and dainty scenes were enacted in her picturesque little drawing-room, on wintry afternoons, after the daylight was gone, and when

the red glow of the fire shone against the walls, and out beyond the unshuttered windows. The dusk peering quietly in might see chairs and tables all pushed on one side, and Lady Beatrix, her little delicate erect figure thrown out by the ruddy light behind her, teaching Kenneth and Marion to dance the stately " minuet de la Cour," for which she had been famous in her youth.

It was pretty to see Marion's sturdy earnestness as she danced ; and the native easy grace of Kenneth's steps and bows ; but prettier far to watch the little grandmother, now pausing with slow dignity and regal air, her head raised and her tiny foot pointed, now sinking down in one of those deep sweeping curtseys, that had lost none of their steady balance in the course of years. And as she moved, the atmosphere of former days seemed to gather round her, brocaded robes to rustle, ghostly cavaliers to bend and sway before her, inaudible voices to speak gallantly or tenderly as she swept along.

Thus, at least, it appeared to one person, who sat in a dark corner, playing the minuet music on a strangely-shaped piano, with mother-of-pearl keys, and a tendency to asthma. That person was the old demoiselle de compagnie, who had been nursery governess to Charley Stuart, and who had known his mother even before those distant days. Brown-faced, stoutly built, Mademoiselle Aglaë (or " Mamzelle Ugly," as she had long since grown content to hear herself called by Scottish tongues), was among the loving and faithful of the earth, and very familiar to her ears was the measured music of the gavottes and minuets which she played.

One of the hoarded treasures in Lady Beatrix's room was a tiny fiddle, laid away carefully in its case, which had once belonged to her uncle, the

Baron de Saint Aulaire, and had been his inseparable companion in the days of the emigration, when he gave dancing lessons in London. Aglaë Tailleur, daughter to the Intendant of his estates on the Loire, followed her master and mistress when they left France. They had endured many hardships —the Baron and Baronne, and the Angevin waiting-woman—for the dancing lessons at the best were very poorly paid; but after Lady Beatrix Stuart married she was able to cheer her old uncle's closing days, and when he died he left to her care his two most contsant friends, the little fiddle, and Mamselle Aglaë.

'Miledi' was now the only remaining link that connected Ugly with the young dream-life that she very imperfectly remembered—with the banks of the Loire, and the kinsfolk and acquaintance of her youth. The two women had clung to each other through many vicissitudes of fortune. They had brought up Charley Stuart, and seen him go out into the world; and now another generation had begun, and it was Charley's little child who was dancing in the firelight.

On some evenings there was no dancing lesson, but the shaded candles were lighted on Granny's table near the fire; and sitting very upright in her high-backed chair, she read aloud "Les Veillées du Château" to the two children, as they sat cross-legged on the hearthrug at her feet.

César and Pulchérie, Delphine, Alphonse and Télismar, M. l'Abbé and Madame la Marquise, sententious shadows from the world of ancient France, came out bowing and moralising as in days of yore, while Kenneth and Marion listened entranced, or shouted with laughter over the prim virtues of the young de Clémires.

But "Bonne Maman," in the book itself, could hardly have enjoyed the "Veillées" more heartily than did their present reader, to whom old associations lent them reality. Château Champcery became her mother's ancestral home in La Vendée; she could see her own Bonne Maman sitting serenely in the huge, dark, dilapidated rooms; she heard Lady Douglas lamenting gaily over the lost delights of Paris, and "les gens" grumbling over the dreariness of a country life.

Frequently the book was dropped on to her lap, and, still speaking French, she rapidly told the children story after story out of her own experience, each one with twenty times more life, and fun, and spirit in it, than any that had ever dawned on the sage imagination of Madame de Genlis.

The boy and girl loved the book for Granny's sake. Once in after years, when Kenneth was a man, he stumbled on one of the little worn volumes, stowed away in the corner of a bookcase. He took it down and opened it, turning slowly over its brown, faded pages—a rush of recollections crowding over him, until he was surprised to find that the crabbed old printing was growing blurred and dim from the tears that filled his eyes.

Poor Kenneth, want of affection was never one of his faults. He only cared too much for love and praise, and dreaded the loss of them too keenly. All through his life he could not turn back unmoved to the bright, sweet memories of his childhood.

He was but fulfilling the law of his destiny when, a year or two afterwards, he grew to be entirely beyond petticoat government, and gave everybody belonging to him a great deal of trouble. His intentions were excellent; he meant no harm whatsoever when he all but blew up the house with

gunpowder. On the contrary, his repentance and pious thankfulness that Granny and Marion had not fallen victims to his experiments, were truly affecting.

But he did not turn over the new leaf that was expected of him; and a day came when justice, prompt and high-handed, descended on his head.

It came about in this way. The portrait (in pastels) of "Euphemia Douglas, Spinster, *ætat* 45," had long possessed an unholy fascination for him; and a certain large pink rose, stuck primly in her blue stomacher, appeared in his eyes the most desirable target which any marksman could aspire to.

One day when, most unluckily for him, his father was sitting in the drawing-room, talking to Lady Beatrix, the deed was done, and an arrow, discharged with somewhat nervous haste from outside the window, found its mark (but fortunately half spent) in Granny's prettiest lace cap.

It took only two of Colonel Douglas's long strides to carry him to the spot, and the hapless archer was captured red-handed, the bow still grasped quivering in his arms.

Kenneth had never encountered anything so formidable as his father's bent brows, low voice, and the fierce grasp that fastened on his shoulder like a vice. Lady Beautrix had been in real peril for an instant, and her nephew was sufficiently frightened to be very angry.

"That was your doing I suppose, sir," he said in a deep and shaky voice.

The boy faltered for a moment and looked round for Marion, who, as usual in the hour of danger, was quickly at his side. That instant's hesitation sealed his fate.

The sentence, quickly pronounced and irrevocable, was imprisonment at Norman's Tower until such

time as his father's leave was over, and then a school in England.

Granny, as soon as she was certified that her ear had not been transfixed, was rather inclined to laugh, and to plead for the culprit, but neither her intercessions nor the agonized supplications of Marion were of any avail.

An hour after, like Jock o' Hazeldean's lady, Marion was left "weeping by the tide," while the boat which carried off the still bewildered Kenneth was receding in the distance. Now it had reached the island, and the shadows from the rocks had fallen athwart it—now it was rounding the point—now it was quite gone.

To have behaved thus to a lady,—for though poor Kenneth had aimed at a pictured "princess" he had actually hit a living one, and then to have hesitated to confess—could he have sinned more deeply against his father's twofold creed of chivalry and honour?

Never had the little fellow experienced such handling as he met with from Colonel Douglas that afternoon at Norman's Tower. If poor Marion could have seen him lying on the ground, with his face hidden on the floor, after his father had left him, she could hardly have mourned for him more bitterly than she did, as she sat in the deserted school-room and poured out her woes into Ugly's sympathising bosom.

And perhaps had Colonel Douglas known the abiding impression of terror that his son received from his severe looks and words, he would not so openly have manifested his displeasure. The child was a child still, and a shock was given to his nerves.

Little Ronald Douglas, over at Dalbraith, was of a sterner fibre than his cousin, and could have borne rough treatment better.

But the impression unwittingly given was, for good or for evil, irrevocably received. Later on in the evening Colonel Douglas returned home, his anger all gone, and nothing but a tender yearning remaining towards his little son. That was Granny's work. He talked to him in so gentle and fatherly a way that Kenneth's elastic spirits rose every minute, and when he sat at dinner with his father, in the queer barrack-looking dining-room, he felt every inch a man, and the troubles of the day were already not forgotten, but left behind.

At that same moment Marion, woman-like, was lovingly and sorrowfully laying aside the possessions he had most valued; his boats, his carpenter's tools, the big knife, whereof all the blades but one were broken, and the ill-fated bow and arrows. Slow tears were dropping on them as she put them one by one into the drawer—and just then his father was smiling kindly on him, and Kenneth was proudly holding up his glass that Adam Haldane, the Colonel's soldier-servant, might fill it half-full of wine.

A tall, gaunt, grim-looking personage was that same Adam, with a long nut-cracker nose and chin, and a pair of rather cunning little red eyes to match his rusty hair. He had been all through the Peninsula with Norman Douglas, and he simply worshipped the ground his Colonel stood upon. His store of campaigning stories was inexhaustible. Whether most of them were true is quite another question. At all events Kenneth firmly believed them all. There was nothing in the world Adam would not have done for his master's son, to whom he had been a devoted nurse in the days of his motherless infancy. Indeed he loved the little fellow not wisely, but too well; for being thoroughly unscrupulous as well as very faithful, he never stopped at an untruth, if he

could thereby get the young master out of any scrape. Kenneth, though rather shocked, was always grateful for his help. He stood in great awe now of his father; the mere drawing together of the grey eyebrows made his heart beat; and, on the other hand, a single word or look of approval filled him with elation.

He learnt two things from Adam while he was at Norman's Tower—one was, to adore his father with something of the old soldier's enthusiasm; the other, to hide away carefully, half in love and half in fear, anything that might vex "his Honour," or bring displeasure on himself.

It really was an affecting scene, when Kenneth, now only held in a sort of honourable captivity, went to the Lady's Lodge, to say good-bye, on the eve of his departure for school. He sat on Granny's knee, his manhood all forgotten, his arms clasped round her neck, sobbing out that he was very sorry; he would not have hurt his dear, dearest, best Granny for the whole, whole world. Granny was crying heartily as she hugged him to her heart. Ugly, in her corner, shook with explosive grief. Even Colonel Douglas sniffed. Poor Marion only was quite past tears.

Thenceforward, her hero only reappeared at intervals, with a sort of fireworks of praise and triumph whizzing round his head. He was a very clever fellow, and his successes at school were really dazzling to himself, and everybody belonging to him.

Dalbraith was very proud of him. Ronald, who, a bigger fellow in body and mind, was also much slower in developing, thought his cousin one of the wonders of the world; but he did not entirely understand him. His own progress through Eton was a much more deliberate affair. Alas! he was a

greater hero to the fishermen and keepers at home than to his Eton masters. Already he was a good shot, and they boasted that he had a quicker eye to mark ptarmigan on the rocky hill than old Fergus himself, and a lighter hand for the "sawmon."

He was a thorough Highlander. His mother could sometimes have found it in her heart to be jealous of Kenneth's prizes; but, on the other hand, Colonel Douglas looked rather wistfully at the young master of Dalbraith.

"Both fine lads, very fine lads," he used to say to Lady Beatrix; "but I sometimes think young Rollo has more of the real old Douglas in him."

"Wait till you hear Kenneth repeating Mr. Macaulay's 'Lays of Ancient Rome,' to Marion, or the Battle-scene out of the 'Lord of the Isles,'" she answered smiling, "and then watch his eyes light up."

"Ah, well," he rejoined, "the boy is such a man of the world. You should have heard him laugh at poor old Grizel's stories—now the other fellow was hanging on her words."

It was quite true that Kenneth scouted all the Highland legends that were so sacred to Grizel, and perhaps, in his heart of hearts, to Colonel Douglas also, but they fascinated Ronald, and especially the many traditions that had gathered like moss on a ruin over the House of Dalbraith.

"Yes, we are very complete," said Lord Douglas, laughing one evening, as they all sat round the fire in the hall. Harold Scrope had been drawing Grizel out, and weird and marvellous were the tales she told. "We have a ghost that nobody ever sees, and a prophecy that nobody believes."

"I assure you, Ronald, they do believe in it," said Lady Douglas. "Old Niel Mackenzie has

many a time made me quite uncomfortable by repeating it. I don't like that prophecy. It gives me a cold shiver down my back."

"What is it about?" asked Harold. "May one hear it?"

"Oh, it's very oracular," said Douglas; "in Gaelic especially, it does not sound nearly so well in English. I have forgotten half of it, but the end is something like this—'When kinsman's hand is dyed with kinsman's blood,—when true is false, and the loving heart grows cold—then the one son of the good father shall cross his threshold for the last time, unless there comes a lassie from the East, who can wash the red hand white.'"

"A hard task for the lassie," said Harold Scrope, with a laugh. "Is it supposed to be Meg, who has come from the East—from East Anglia, at all events?"

"Don't laugh," said Margaret. "I have never liked somehow to hear that prophecy."

"Meg, I always thought you were a strong-minded woman," observed her husband.

"Come, we'll change the subject," said Harold. "Rollo there looks as if some one was walking over his grave. Are you quite sure, Meg, you have never seen the ghost?"

"Indeed," said Grizel, "and I don't wonder at dear Margaret's feeling timid, when we know how often our Highland prophecies come true."

"Really, Cousin Grizzy?" asked Ronald eagerly; "really true?"

"What for not, laddie? Why, ye will have heard about the Mackenzies of Seaforth, and I could tell no end of others."

"Oh, do tell me, Cousin Grizzy."

And therewith began a long half-whispered dialogue, Grizel recounting story after story in a low

monotonous "awsome" voice, with her finger lifted impressively on high, Ronald sitting in front of her, with his elbows on his knees, and his chin propped on his hands, while his big grey eyes were fixed intently on her face.

The others looked round occasionally when his clear young voice broke in upon the solemn narrative: "I *say*, Cousin Grizzy! He didn't see it really? And what did the warlock do next?"

"Grizzy," said Lord Douglas, coming behind her chair at last; "I believed you to be a decent God-fearing body, instead of a doited heathen, with your auld wives' fables."

"Yes, but, father—wait one moment—and did he really hear the horses shaking their silver bridles under the moss, Cousin Grizzy?"

"Oh Rollo! oh Grizzy! Well, come, let us hear the end."

But Grizel was shocked, and would not tell another word. "Only perhaps the day will come to some of you when you won't laugh at the 'doom of Dalbraith,'" she said, looking round warningly upon them all.

"I don't laugh now," said Margaret; and she got up from her chair, for it was time to go to bed, and the lights were burning dim, and the fire had sunk so low that there was a chill feeling in the hall.

Notwithstanding his father's laughter, Ronald fell asleep that night with the words of the prophecy running in his head—"When kinsman's blood is shed by kinsman's hand"—"the red hand white"—how did it go?—"a lassie from the East"—and then Ronald was asleep.

CHAPTER V

"SNOW FALLS IN THE RIVER"

"How are ye a' at hame,
I' my ain countree?
Are your kind hearts a' the same,
I' my ain countree?
Are ye a' as fu' of glee,
As witty, frank, and free,
As blithe as ye used to be,
I' my ain countree?"

SANDYSMERE, in Norfolk, the former home of Margaret Douglas, was undoubtedly a fine place. "A great big white and green place," as Ronald, accustomed to the wild brilliancy of the Highland colouring, once disrespectfully described it. There were broad white roads across the park; long lines of white stone balustrades, and terrace-steps round the house; a broad sheet of water that lay almost white in winter under the pale sky.

It all sounds rather cold—perhaps the place had rather a cold effect—but it was very fine. The trees were large, and stately oak or elm avenues stretched straight away for miles, crossed here and there by fresh processions of younger trees. You could see for a long way down the chief avenue, for it took no turns, and the road beneath its shade had never a twist, nor an up nor a down, until it vanished far away through some lodge-gates into the deer-park.

The ground sloped from the terrace almost imperceptibly towards the mere, and hardly seemed

to take the trouble to rise again on the opposite shore; but the sheet of water, on which floated several snowy swans, was very broad and handsome, and lay well in front of the chief façade of the house.

Just now it was winter, and the great stone-bordered flower-beds on the terrace, that glowed like tesselated pavement in the month of August, were skilfully planted with dwarf evergreens and golden yew. The scarlet geraniums had disappeared from the vases, and the orange-trees had moved into winter quarters.

Sandysmere was a place to command a certain admiration for its faultless keeping—a little weariness—perhaps a slight degree of awe. Strangers might fall into the grievous mistake of fancying it was all too stiff and too grand for people to be at home in it—to laugh, or romp, or be untidy. That would have been a mistake indeed. There are certain windows up in that great pile belonging to play-rooms and nurseries, and school-rooms, that could tell rather a different story. But the perfect order of the whole was a little chilling, and as Ronald Douglas, one December evening, drove down the long avenue of bare trees, with his father and mother, he thought it tiresome to see no fallen leaves on the smooth-shaven turf; and truly pitiable, that the deer, languidly curious, should gaze tamely at the carriage as it went by.

It was a long time since Lady Douglas had spent Christmas at her old home. Her father had been in office for several years, and had been little at Sandysmere himself, and afterwards the whole family passed a couple of winters in Italy. Ronald had never seen the place, and had begun by being rather aggrieved at the prospect of going there for his Christmas holidays instead of home to Dalbraith.

A few stray words, however, that Harold Scrope let fall about hunting produced a magical effect, and he was arriving at Sandysmere with almost as much eagerness as his mother.

"It isn't freezing at all, is it, father? it feels quite stuffy and warm."

No, it was not freezing; the darkening, misty December afternoon was all that could be wished from a hunting point of view; and as the carriage drove under the stone portico, one or two men in red coats vanished through a side entrance, leaving Lord Sandysmere standing alone to bid his daughter welcome. He held her hand and led her into the great marble hall, its roof reaching up to the top of the house, where the sonorous echoes instantly carried Margaret back to her childish days; recalling wonderful games of hide-and-seek, and firelight romps upon the straight flight of stone stairs.

Lady Sandysmere was standing now upon the first step, and before Margaret had reached the top, a number of people were running down to meet her. There was a confusion of greetings, and Ronald was shaken hands with by so many uncles and cousins, and kissed by so many aunts, that his notions of relationship were considerably enlarged.

There was a large party at Sandysmere, composed chiefly of the family, and it was Ronald's first introduction into society.

An hour or two later he was standing in a dark corner of the drawing-room watching the guests as they came down before dinner.

On the hearth, in front of a huge fire that almost lighted the room, stood a man with a bald head, very restless dark eyes, a black moustache, and a riband at his botton-hole. Ronald was perfectly confounded at seeing this individual rush forward as

Lord Douglas came into the room, and throwing his arms round him, bestow a sounding kiss on each of his cheeks. Ronald's English, still more his Scottish, prejudices were deeply hurt. His father was surely disgraced by being subjected to such an unheard-of indignity—kissed in the drawing-room before everybody! Ronald blushed crimson, and glanced furtively round the room to see if everybody was shocked, or still worse, if everybody was laughing. But no; people seemed to be taking it very quietly, and Lord Douglas himself looked pleased and rather excited. He was standing beside his unknown friend, who, after a profound and elaborate bow, was in the act of raising Lady Douglas's hand to his lips.

"Making a fool of mother too," thought Ronald indignantly. "Who can the fellow be? I wonder my grandfather likes to have him here."

But, behold, Lord Douglas was looking round as if in search of somebody. Margaret pointed to his corner, and here were both his father and the stranger coming across the room. "Yes, René," he heard Lord Douglas say, "he is my only son;" and then two hands were warmly held out to him, and for one fearful moment Ronald thought that he was going to be kissed too. He backed into a stand of hot-house flowers; tried to release at least one hand; glanced appealingly at his father; and, finally, hopelessly submitted to be drawn out into the light, scrutinised from head to foot by the quick black eyes, pronounced the image of "Papa," and patted on the cheek as if he had been a baby of six years old.

"Ah, coquin," said René de Beaurepaire, turning back to Lord Douglas with a laugh, "do you remember Saint Germain?"

And then other people entered by twos and threes, and the room began to fill. Mary Scrope, the only remaining unmarried daughter of the house, appeared, surrounded as usaul by an adoring body-guard of younger brothers and nephews. Ronald was enrolled into the corps next day, but just now he stood alone and watched. There was a tall man, and a short man, a man with a grey beard, a man with a red beard, and a man with no beard at all; there was a lady in black, a lady in pink, a lady in white, and a lady in pink, black, and white, all three. There were two girls dressed alike who stood side by side, and were talked to by the man with the red beard; and there was a couple who came in very late, and did not appear the least disconcerted, though the gong had sounded, and the folding-doors been thrown open with great pomp, at least five minutes before.

At dinner Ronald could not resist watching Monsieur de Beaurepaire with a sort of unwilling fascination. He despised the foreign way in which he handled his knife and fork and napkin; his courteous smile, and the low tone in which he was evidently making some pretty speech (awful humbug, Ronald felt convinced), to the hostess, by whose side he was sitting.

But still there was something attractive in the clear, sharp speech; the slight gestures, the changeful expression; and once, when he had finished his soup, Ronald saw him lean forward and glance down the table towards Lord Douglas with a genuine smile and look of affection, that went far towards overcoming the boy's natural prejudice against a Frenchman.

Yet it was a melancholy face when in repose; and an older observer than Ronald would have

discovered the cynical expression which had grown habitual to him, when he sat, as he was fond of doing, silent and observant.

Monsieur de Beaurepaire was a diplomate, and had been Minister both at a German and an Italian court. He married an Englishwoman, but his wife was dead. A keen sportsman, there was a charm to him in everything English; most of his spare time was spent in this country, and none of the later friendships of his life were half so dear to him as his early intercourse with Lord Douglas, and the bright young days he used to spend at Dalbraith.

It was his father, Raoul, Marquis de Beaurepaire, who loved and deserted Lady Beatrix Douglas. She had avenged herself in later times by a kindness and affection for the son, which he repaid with a sort of enthusiasm. It was René himself who had introduced Lord Douglas and Margaret Scrope to one another. The two families were always being oddly thrown together, and on both sides there was a sort of superstition on the subject.

"I wish that the hereditary friendship could be carried on through our children," said Monsieur de Beaurepaire that evening; and he laid his head on Ronald's shoulder as he spoke. "*Dites donc*, shall it be so, my friend?"

Ronald was not of an age to care much about hereditary friendships; the speech sounded sentimental, and he could think of nothing to say in reply.

"You must send us over Gaston and Agénor to the Highlands some of these days," said Lord Douglas, coming to his help.

("French fellows—Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Ronald, in the silence of his own heart.)

"You have but those two, René, have you?"

"And my little Diane," answered M. de Beaurepaire, "my only daughter. Tell me, does my Lord shoot to-morrow?"

* * * * *

"Well, Margaret, how do you feel in civilised life again?" asked Harold Scrope, sitting down beside his sister. "It is odd to see you descended from your eyrie."

"All the people I remember look to me so old," said Margaret, contemplating the groups around her.

Harold laughed. "Do they?—they haven't lived on Highland air and hodge-podge. I think they look much tamer and more comfortable than you do. You really have the look of an eagle among a lot of carefully-reared pheasants. Meg, I say, where is your worsted work?"

"I don't possess any," answered Lady Douglas in her solemn way.

"Everybody is knitting, or playing on the piano, or doing something useful, except you. I am really afraid you are not like other people, Meg!"

It was true enough that Lady Douglas was not too much like other people. She had lost that habit of little easy talk, that people get by living in the world. Perhaps she had never possessed it in any great degree; but there was a solitary look about her as she sat in the morning among the the other ladies in the drawing-room, with no work to occupy her—her hands crossed on her knee, and her eyes following one speaker after another, as they talked idly on.

"Where do you get your little boy's shoes?" asked one young matron of another, with an air of intense interest; and then pocket-books were

brought out and some invaluable addresses were exchanged. Margaret listened dreamily. Even the unwonted magnificence of her own velvet gown was oppressive to her.

The winter sun flooded the big room, the fire blazed, the brake went driving away down the straight white road across the park, carrying a party of shooters to a distant covert; from a far-off school-room came the faint sound of scales, played evenly, unevenly,—stopping, going on again,—faster, slower,—a grand confusion, and then a laborious return to the first note. The party round the fire talked about London; about some Gerald and Adelaide whom Lady Douglas did not know; about little boys' shoes and new books—and she sat gazing out of the window, a vision of her youth coming back to her with the atmosphere of the room, scented by stephanotis and Russian violets, with the silvery chimes of a clock playing a well-remembered air, with the miniature of herself dressed in a white frock and blue ribbons, which lay on the table before her.

Coming home was hardly, to her, what it would have been to many people after so long an absence. She was very fond of her own family, and the scenes of her young days were dear and pleasant to her, but—every day she realized it more—Sandysmere was nothing to her in comparison with Dalbraith. That which her brother Harold had said of her in the early days of her marriage was even more true now. She could see no one in the world but Douglas. Her people recognized it with a smile and a sigh. It was pleasant to see her so happy, so absorbed. Lady Sandysmere took the second place in Margaret's heart, the more willingly that she was herself very fond of her son-in-law. No one could live

with Douglas without loving him, and there was a sort of lofty force of character about him that made itself more felt every year. They were all proud of belonging to him.

Margaret's son grew very popular at Sandysmere. No one liked him the less for what they called his staring likeness to his father. It was impossible to resist listening to the sound of his voice chattering away, and his merry infectious laugh, or to fail being cheered by the fearless sunshine on his face.

"It's a real blessing, Meg, that your boy does not talk loud, for it's my belief he never stops," said Harold Scrope, and in the family this was considered a great compliment, Uncle Harold so seldom praised any one. "Harold thinks Ronald has a remarkably sweet voice," said Ronald's grandmother, complacently.

The boy, perfectly unconscious of the good impression he was making, was enjoying himself supremely. He was in love, boy fashion, with all his cousins; and the aunts, captivated by his gentle and caressing manner, were in love with him. The uncles were propitiated by his thorough boyishness, his ready blush, and modest way of talking. Lord Sandysmere took him out hunting, and Ronald acquitted himself well enough to make his grandfather proud of him.

"Nicest boy I ever saw," was the universal verdict of the elders. "Oh, we could not possibly spare Ronald before quite the end of the holidays," exclaimed all the young ones in chorus. "It would be too dull without him."

Margaret was pleased that every one liked her son, but to her it seemed a simple matter of course that Douglas's boy should be a favourite, because she really did think him very like his father. Ronald

himself flushed crimson with pleasure when he was told that she had said so. He had not been brought up on compliments, but perhaps that was not a bad thing for him.

People often noticed how happy and comfortable the three—father, mother, and son—seemed together, though Margaret was not outwardly a caressing mother, and Lord Douglas was sometimes said to make Ronald treat her with an almost obsolete amount of courtesy and respect.

The last weeks of the year rolled quickly and cheerily away at Sandysmere, and the big rooms that had looked strange and solemn at first, with their fine ceilings and dark pictures and tapestry, grew quite familiar, and were associated with all sorts of gaiety and fun.

There was one room which was always looked upon by the younger members of the family as the centre and kernel of their home. It was called the 'Den,' and a very charming old den it was. Tradition said that the black panelling round its walls, and the high wooden chimney-piece with its carved picture-frame, were the only relics that had been saved from the ancient Sandysmere Hall, burnt down more than a hundred years ago. That fire was still a standing grievance among all the Scropes. They never ceased mourning over the old hall; its picture hung in the Den, a beautiful old Tudor house, like "Hardwicke Hall, more glass than wall," most picturesque and inconvenient. But it was gone, and all that remained of it was to be found now in the Den.

Dear old room!—what histories it might have told. How many family councils had been held within its walls!—how many secrets whispered across its hearth! There, for good or for evil, the

choice that was to decide a life-time had frequently been come to; there quarrels had been made up with tears and kisses; it had witnessed the joy of meetings, and the silent sorrow of bereavement.

Mary Scrope reigned there now, and thither gathered all the younger people on the winter afternoons.

The kettle sang its inviting song for two whole hours each evening, on the old-fashioned hob (no urn was ever allowed to desecrate the Den), and Mary, generally in her riding-habit, sat pouring out an endless succession of cups of tea. In the big arm-chairs on each side of the fire, tired sportsmen, still in their scarlet coats and muddy boots, would be lounging half asleep. In front of the fire some devoted being knelt with a scorched face and a huge toasting-fork, supplying a hungry circle with hot toast. Choruses were practised round the school-room piano; old boxes of costumes were ransacked. Sometimes Lord Sandysmere looked in, and with a guilty "Don't tell mother," indulged in a stolen cup of tea. Monsieur de Beaurepaire regularly appeared, and, cup in hand, joined in the choruses while he sipped his "coptee," as he called it.

To decorate the Den was the crowning work of Christmas. How they piled it up with holly and ivy and mistletoe!—the picture above the mantelpiece—a portrait of that Lord Sandysmere who was supposed to have let the old hall burn,—being decorated with a long spray of sharp-pointed holly-leaves that pricked his nose, and hid his eye under a scarlet lump of berries.

With all his stout championship of Scotland Ronald was forced to confess the superior cheeriness of an English Christmas.

This was an exceptional one in beauty. "All sparkling snow and blue sky," said Harold Scrope, "like one of Dickens's stories."

Mother Earth and Father Christmas were holding their silver wedding, and the old lady had arrayed herself in all her bravery to do her venerable bridegroom honour. Snowy raiment covered her, and she was adorned with glancing brilliants—his gifts—and delicate hoar-frost lace.

The hunting, with a sigh, gave place to skating on the mere.

Mary Scrope thought of nothing from morning till night but blankets, red cloaks, and flannel petticoats. "She ran about in the village all day," said her aggrieved kinsmen, "instead of staying with them on the ice like a reasonable being."

To the village indeed she and Lady Douglas betook themselves nearly every day. It was a part of her youth to which Margaret returned gladly, though even there the changes made her feel old, and she could hardly recognize, in the hard-featured faces, and figures prematurely bowed, the rosy maidens, her seniors by a year or two, whom she had been so proud of teaching in the Sunday school. And the dear old bodies, her especial cronies, most of them were gone!—their chimney-corners and wooden elbow-chairs knew them no more.

The quaint East Anglian tongue is fast losing its individuality. Its oddity consists chiefly now in the curious sing-song in which it is delivered, and in the reckless bringing together of all the words the speaker least understands. It still sounded pleasantly in Margaret's ears. Greetings thickened on her as she walked up the village street. "Ah! old Bryant's cottage—is he still alive? Why, Mary, there is Rhoda Brighton, not looking a day older.

She was ninety, I know, when you were born. Oh! Widow Clark, do you remember me?" Ecstatic curtseys in the road.

"What sure, 'tis Lady Douglas, so 'tis! I han't clapped eyes on you since you was wed, and that's the tre-uth. But I saw you tied, that I did; I had a mind to go to Sans'mere Church that day, and so I took 'Liza Jane along. 'Twas a buty of a sight. I was fo'ced to flow to tears in the churchyard when you was a steering out, and so was 'Liza Jane. Won't you come right in, my dear, and drop?"

Lady Douglas walked in and sat down as she was desired.

"See, Mrs. Clark, this is my son whom I have brought to see you!"

"What, sure? Well, bless him, bless him, and you han't but that one. There's my Nelly, she that used to stir round the housekeeper up at yours, she ha' got seven, and two of them twinsies, but she ha' buried five, and t'other is a going—(she's a poor creature, is my Nelly, but very moderate, she is)—but 'tis a misgrace that you have but the one."

"The young gentleman don't favour yu, Miss Margaret," said Eliza Jane, "but I allus' said you were very like my old mother, for you never carried no plush;" which being interpreted meant that Lady Douglas had never had a colour.

"I'm but sadly, Miss Margaret, my Lady, if you'll accuse me," sighed the more melancholy inhabitant of the next cottage, "but I mind you well. No, 'tis the rheumatiz that catch me here, and catch me there, so I am hampered to get hold of my breath. I often expect I shall be took off sudden."

"And so I respect she will," echoed her brisk daughter. "She ain't long for here, the old lady ain't, and 'twould be a mercy to herself, I often tell her, if 'twould please the Lord to take her. Last night now she shrook out, and I thought she was a going—"

"There's no one knows what I suffer," resumed Mrs. Collins, waving aside the interruption with dignity, "but God and my dear limbs; but I won't contain you at the present, and I hop' I see you well, my Lady, and your good gentleman tu."

"And I hop'," put in the old husband, who, sitting in the chimney-corner, had been shaking hands vehemently with Margaret during the whole conversation, "I hop' he uses of you well, for marriage 'tis a lottery. There was my son John, married a worldly woman, and he hadn't been wedded but a week when she took the stick to him, that she did."

"That was very sad," said Margaret; "poor John! I remember him when he was no older than my boy here."

"Well, bless the lad," said the old man, proceeding to shake hands in a prolonged way with Ronald, "and may he be a better man nor his father."

"I say," ejaculated Ronald indignantly, but his mother laughed at the familiar formula.

Mary was flitting busily from one house to another. They found her standing by the bed of a sick young man.

"Yes, my Lady, he fare to lay so long," said the mother, outspoken and solemn, but not unkindly. "'Tis a dispense, but we must put up with him."

Margaret asked if he had seen the doctor. Yes; William had got his two bottles of physic as 't were 'propriate.

"The tu medicines don't fare to corroborate together," observed his mother, "but my son he ha' condescended to both. He don't get no strength, Miss Mary, for he have no perceivins for eating, and that's where 'tis."

"I fare," interrupted the invalid, languidly, "as though I could pick a mite o' rabbit."

"Lawk, a rabbit!" continued his mother; "his mind du seem wonderful set on a rabbit. 'Mother,' he says to me last night, at half-past ten o'clock, or t'might be on the stroke of 'leven, 'Mother,' he sa', quite as I might be speaking now, 'if so be as I could happen of a rabbit, I du think,' says he, 'he would put a tiddy bit of life into my dear inside,' and"—very slowly—"I *du* believe, Miss Mary, as t'would."

Mary promised that the rabbit should be forthcoming, on which William's dull eyes brightened up wonderfully, and he managed to sit up and give a pull to his lank forelock of grateful expectation and farewell.

"Shall we go and see old Kitty?" asked Mary doubtfully, and hesitating on the threshold. But at this point Ronald's patience, long sorely tried, gave way. Laying hold on Mary's arm he protested that he had seen dozens of old women, and that his aunt had promised to come and play hockey on the ice. Besides he knew Kitty was the horrid old thing in bed, whom Aunt Mary herself was afraid of, believing her to be Little Red-Riding-Hood's Wolf dressed up in her Grandmother's night-cap.

Guests came and went at Sandysmere; new friendships were made, and old ones knitted up afresh. Among these last was Monsieur de Beaurepaire's devotion to Lord Douglas. They were fond of each other without agreeing. Indeed two

people could not easily have been found who looked at life from more directly opposite ends. The Frenchman was tired of the world, and yet lived for nothing else. He was cynical and prejudiced, holding rather a low opinion of his fellow-men. But Lord Douglas always managed to call out his best side, and he had become an enthusiastic admirer of Margaret's. She was so beautiful, looked so young, and was such a devoted wife. If his only daughter, his little Diane, could have been brought up under the care of such a woman, such a mother! Poor little one left to *bonnes* and governesses!

"Ah, Madame!" he said pathetically to Margaret, "if only you were of my nation."

Margaret had become so far like other people that she had learnt to knit since she came to Sandysmere, and she was now struggling with an untidy grey fabric, supposed by very sanguine people to be a stocking, which might possibly be ready for Lord Douglas to wear when he went out deer-stalking next season.

She sat with her hands held out far before her, the grey yarn twisted hopelessly round her fingers, three of the needles crushed together in one hand, while with the other she was trying by main force to push the fourth needle into a very tight stitch. Her brow was contracted, and the worsted ball had rolled on to the floor, and wound itself hopelessly round the leg of M. de Beaurepaire's chair.

A little way off sat Margaret's sister Winifred, leaning luxuriously back in an arm-chair, an open book on the low table beside her, and a smart little child's sock growing visibly under her careless and rapid fingers. She knitted and read, glancing up occasionally with amused eyes at her unskilful pupil. Her comfort and prosperity were almost

insulting; Margaret had made her stitch, but she forgot to "purl," and was engaged in desperate difficulties. What at such a moment was to her the future of little Diane de Beaurepaire?

"Favour me," observed Diane's father impatiently, "by putting down that work; it does not suit your style."

"My style?" repeated Margaret, looking up.

"Yes! that *tripotage* does not suit you. It breaks the grand tranquillity which distinguishes you."

Lady Douglas laughed. "You can't think how difficult it is," she said, holding out her arm and straightening her stiffened fingers.

"Then let us leave it to those who can do no better. I recommence—Would, as I said before, that you and Douglas were my compatriots."

"And why?" inquired Lady Douglas, opening her eyes, and thinking how little she could join in the aspiration.

"In a few years we should enter into a family arrangement. I should then have some hope for my poor little daughter. She would be affianced to your son, and you would feel a mother's interest in the child."

"Ah, but you know I do not understand girls," said Lady Douglas, smiling. "I am glad I have only got a boy."

"You would have made your daughter like yourself—true, good, simple, a real woman."

"And I who cannot even learn to knit," said Margaret.

He would not smile.

"Tell me, is there really no hope for my little girl?"

"But you are not talking seriously;" and Margaret laid down her work, and looked at him in dismay.

M. de Beaurepaire had fixed his piercing black eyes on her, and was evidently very serious indeed.

Just then Douglas came up to them with a message from Lord Sandysmere who wanted M. de Beaurepaire for a rubber of whist.

"We are discussing a *projet de mariage*," said the latter, without rising. "Some of these days I want your Ronald to be my son-in-law."

"You do us much honour," said Ronald's father, laughing. "Come, René, they are waiting for you."

M. de Beaurepaire looked almost offended.

"My dear René, you know our English ways as well as I do," said Lord Douglas.

"But there are exceptional cases," resumed René, eagerly; "and my little Diane has no mother. She is being brought up *à l'Anglaise*. I wish her to make an English marriage—she is of your faith—and that your wife should form her mind and character would fulfil my most ardent dreams for her."

"We are very much honoured," repeated Douglas, "but you really must not talk of such a scheme in England. Every one would laugh at us. No, no; Ronald must be free to choose for himself as his father did before him."

"May he only be half as fortunate in his choice," was the Frenchman's inevitable rejoinder; but it was scarcely uttered with so good a grace as usual.

"Some years hence," he presently began again; but a new and urgent summons from his host cut him short.

He got up, made a formal bow to Lady Douglas, and with the words, "*à une autre fois, Madame*," he walked rather haughtily away.

Margaret and her husband looked at each other and laughed.

"I am afraid he is half offended?" said Margaret.

"More than half, I fancy. I should like to have seen poor Ronald's face if he had heard the proposal," said Lord Douglas.

"It really was very awkward; he actually seemed to mean it."

"Of course he did. Poor old René, I like him for being anxious about his child. I wish with all my heart we could help him without this preposterous plan."

"Oh, I hope he will not say any more."

"Why, I don't believe he will forget it; he is curiously persistent, and, as I told you before, we and the Beaurepaires are always being thrown against each other. There is a fate in it, Grizel would say. How should you like a French daughter-in-law, Meg?"

"Don't talk of it."

"It was a great compliment to you, you know," observed her husband. "I wish poor René had asked us anything in reason. Now, I must go and talk to your mother. Don't tell a soul, Meg, for Ronald's sake. I would not trust even Harold's discretion with such a good story. By the way, why should not Harold marry Diane, and make your mother a happy woman?"

For Harold Scrope's determined bachelorhood was the one crumple in his mother's rose-leaf life.

Meanwhile, Ronald, shouting choruses in the next room at the top of his voice, was very far from guessing how his future life had been under discussion. Equally unconscious was a little maiden, far away in a big room of a big house, in a big German city, on that winter's night.

Two children were standing on chairs, in a window that looked out on a snow-covered Platz, with rows of lamps, and frosted trees, and a church over

which the stars were shining, and were flattening their little noses against the panes.

One child wore a little tight cap on her round head, hiding her lint-white locks; and a black boddice fitted her small plump person. She was the house-porter's daughter, a thorough little German "Mädel," somewhat stolid and slow of speech.

The other child chattered away fast enough for both, and now and then a trill of the merriest laughter rung gaily through the room. Between them they held a venerable, battered doll, with a cracked nose, and eyes that, owing to a broken spring mysteriously disposed in her body, refused either to open or shut properly. The little German grasped her by the legs, while the other energetically drove pins into her head to keep on a torn black wig.

"Everybody has to do it," she was saying gravely; "but I think it must hurt, Gretchen."

Gretchen looked at her with round, alarmed eyes.

"I know, because I see Pauline doing her hair every day, and sometimes Mrs. Doran. They stick the pins straight into their heads through the long plaits—so. I think the pins must run into their brain, but I suppose grown-up people do not mind the pain. Thou wilt have to do it too, Gretchen, when thou art big."

"I won't," answered Gretchen, stolidly.

"Thou must; see, I will show thee how. I will only send in the pin a little way, not so far as thy brains."

Armed with a big pin, she fell on to her small companion, and pierced through the little cap and the flaxen hair in a moment.

Gretchen gave a shriek of terror, and tumbled off her chair on to the floor.

"She has hurt me; she has hurt me!—she pricked me with a pin."

"Mademoiselle Diane," said a grave voice.

But Diane was on the ground already, with her arms round Gretchen's neck; "I am sorry, I am sorry; I did not mean to hurt thee; I thought everybody had to stick the pins in."

"Why did you not try on your own head, Mademoiselle Diane?"

"I did," said Diane, naïvely; "but my head is so hard, Gretchen's looked much softer. Dear little Gretchen, did I hurt thee, really? Oh, Gretchen," for Gretchen rolled on the floor, refusing to be comforted.

Two big tears made their appearance on Diane's cheeks. "See, Gretchen;" and she knelt on the floor and clasped her hands; "I will give thee *any* thing I have—thou shalt choose—only get well."

Gretchen ceased rolling, and peeped at Diane from under her arm. "See, Gretchen, all these pretty things. Do get up; oh, I am glad."

The two little maids presently went hand in hand to a table, on which Diane's Christmas presents were still laid out. There were plenty of toys and bonbons, a little tea-set, a Swiss village in a wooden box, a boy with a hoop made of sparkling coloured sugar (most beautiful), a toy watch.

Some way off stood a cradle, in which lay one of those marvellous waxen babies that are only to be found in London; no composition, like poor old Rosalind; plump wax hands and feet, rose-coloured cheeks, staring china blue eyes, and, in place of a wig, soft curls that really seemed to be growing on the head itself.

Gretchen soon caught sight of this youthful beauty. "I want *her*," she said laconically.

"Oh, not her; I did not mean her; thou shalt have anything else. Oh, Gretchen, please. My father sent her all the way from England. I love her so."

Up went Gretchen's lip, and her round cheeks were puffed out ready for a cry.

"She said I might have what I liked."

"Not my father's doll, Gretchen, please not. Take all the rest—my watch, the sugar boy—but not her."

"I want her," sobbed Gretchen; "and thou hast pricked me with a pin."

"What shall I do?—oh, ma bonne, tell her to take the sugar boy."

"You said she might choose what she liked, Mademoiselle Diane."

The child grew very pale, and put her fingers into her eyes to force back the tears she was determined not to shed. In a few minutes she looked up, and stamped her foot.

"Take her, Gretchen, then, and go away, quick. You are wicked; I won't play with you."

Selfish little Gretchen, nothing loth, seized upon her prize, and was trotting off, bewildered, dazzled, hugging it very tightly to her breast.

"Wait," called Diane, suddenly; "she will be cold without her cradle; take that too, and her bonnet; and, oh, Gretchen, be good to her."

Gretchen grasped it all, half sobbing still; and clattered away as fast as her legs could carry her.

Diane looked after her, and then rushed back into the window, to fight out her battle as best she might, in the starlight and snow-whiteness.

An hour or two afterwards her 'bonne' went to her bedside to see if she was asleep. Her eyes were still wide open, and her cheeks flushed; but cuddled close to her side she held the old doll with the broken nose, and wig awry, and the eyes that would neither shut nor open.

"It's all for the best after all, ma bonne," said the child; "for see, this poor old thing thought I did not love her any more, and now she is so happy, and I love her, and I will never have another doll; and" —a pause—"I *think* I forgive Gretchen."

"Go to sleep, Mademoiselle Diane."

"Yes, ma bonne." She nestled her cheek on to the black wig, drew old Rosalind closer to her side with a loving smile, and was asleep in a moment.

This was Ronald's little rejected bride.

CHAPTER VI

DULE AND SORROW

"Sweet the lavrock's note and lang,
Lilting wildly up the glen,
But aye to me he sings a'e sang—
Will ye no' come back again?

Will ye no' come back again,
Will ye no come back again,
Better lo'ed ye canna be,
Will ye no' come back again?"

THE month of August had come round again, and shooting had begun in the Highlands.

Both Ronald and Kenneth were at home,—a pair of boys, as Grizel proudly said, to make the hearts of any fathers glad.

It may be that Lord Douglas and his uncle thought so too, as they watched their sons walking on in front of them, with their guns over their shoulders one day, when they were shooting black game in the woods on the south side of Loch Dalbraith.

Ronald and Kenneth made rather a good contrast, for one was tall, straight, and dark-eyed like his mother, and his face was tanned brown by the summer sun and wind. The other still kept the brilliant fairness of his childhood, and was secretly rather ashamed of the red and white complexion and auburn locks, which old Adam Haldane told him made him look like a lassie.

There had been a merry luncheon among the rocks, at the foot of rather a steep hill, with the

coppice of birch-wood, fir-trees, and beeches, through which they were next to shoot, straggling up its side.

Colonel Douglas had to leave them after luncheon, and the two boys went on alone with Lord Douglas. The three stood on the rocks above the loch for a few minutes, watching Norman's boat glide out from the bank, and then they turned to climb the rocky path up into the wood. Kenneth, who was usually not so good a shot as Ronald, was shooting uncommonly well that day, and Douglas had been praising him at luncheon. His cheeks had flushed under his cousin's commendation. Praise—always welcome to him—was doubly sweet when spoken in his father's hearing, and he was eager to prove himself worthy this afternoon of the laurels he had earned in the morning. He had gone on rather in front, and the father and son followed,—Lord Douglas with his arm thrown caressingly over Ronald's shoulder.

It was a warm sunny day, in the month which, of all in the year, is the loveliest at Dalbraith.

Both the boys were too much taken up with their shooting to think much about the beauty of the familiar scene, but every year brought his beloved home nearer to Lord Douglas's heart. He stopped now for a minute to glance back over his shoulder at the shining loch lying down below, and at the birch-trees, where a golden glimmer was beginning here and there to gleam among the leaves. Under his feet was spread the thick carpet of gale and heather, and through breaks in the wood he could see it stretching far away into the open, only deepened to a more glowing red by the mellow sunshine of the afternoon. Some of the fronds of bracken were changing to a bright straw-colour, making dashes of yellow among the grey rocks and purple heather. And above the delicate birches grew a few rugged

Scotch firs, thrusting out their long red arms and sombre masses of foliage, against the deep blue of the sky.

A feeling of almost melancholy affection came over Lord Douglas as he lingered on the edge of the hill, and then the boys' eager voices roused him, calling him to go on into the wood.

He went forward slowly, with Rory his piper, who had also been his foster brother, close behind him, and the others followed in line.

There had been several shots fired. Kenneth had missed once or twice, and was growing vexed and impatient. He fired recklessly at a rabbit that was fairly out of shot, and had scarcely reloaded his gun when he heard ' mark ' called from two different spots at once. It was a long shot, but he took a rapid aim and fired; and at the same moment he heard the report of another gun.

It came from the direction which Ronald had taken through the wood. More shots had come to Ronald than to the others, and at the moment the bird rose at which he and Kenneth fired together, he was thinking that all the luck seemed to come his way, and that he wished he could change places with his father.

He could not see whether he had hit his bird or not, but the instant after the shot was fired he became aware, how he scarcely knew, that something was wrong. There were confused sounds, and then a scream from Rory, shrill and sharp like a woman's, rang out on the air.

Ronald stood still,—transfixed,—listening, thrilled through with a vague horror—one or two men ran past him through the wood, and then as he gatheerd himself together to follow, Kenneth met him coming back, pale as death, and scarcely able to articulate

—" Ronald, quick, your father is hurt; you hit him just now."

" I ! "

A mist gathered over his eyes, the heather seemed to rise up and smite him, and then the ground to be sinking away from beneath his feet, but he steadied himself and rushed on, stumbling blindly across the rocks and trees.

A knot of men that parted as he came up—a tangle of brushwood—a mass of trodden-down fern—a rowan tree bending under bunches of scarlet berries that dazzled him and seemed to burn his eyes; and, on the ground, Rory holding Lord Douglas in his arms.

Ronald flung himself down beside his father. The face that rested against Rory's shoulder bore no look of pain, but it was of dull deadly whiteness, and the eyes were closed. Fergus and one or two of the others were trying with shaking and unskilled hands to staunch the blood that flowed from a wound in the side of his neck.

" Canna ye gar the bluid to stop? " Ronald heard Rory whisper with fierce suppressed impatience. " It's just drainin' his life awa'."

" He's not bleedin' much," said Ronald, looking up imploringly into the faces round him.

" But I'm feared the bleedin' is inward," answered old Fergus.

Some one brought water and sprinkled it on to Lord Douglas's forehead. His eyes slowly opened. Perhaps he could see his foster-brother's look of stony despair as he bent over him, and the ashy face of his son. " Rory," he said, in a weak voice, and then a moment afterwards he smiled—" Ronald, my boy; poor fellow."

" You are better, father ! " But the eyes closed again, and the grey shadow deepened on his face.

The men had made a rough litter of some hurdles near at hand, and now they were tearing up ling and bracken in frantic haste that he might lie as softly as might be, while they carried him home to Dalbraith. Rory walking behind still supported his master's head on his breast, and they moved away slowly down towards the loch.

Ronald followed among the others, the men brushing their sleeves often across their eyes, the dogs walking behind with wistful looks and drooping tails, well aware that something had gone wrong. Suddenly Ronald stood still as they drew near the boat.

"Did some one say that I did this?" he asked, snatching old Fergus's arm, while a quick scarlet flush mounted to his forehead.

All were silent for a minute or two; the men looked on the ground; one of them shook his head; nobody cared to answer.

"Will you tell me?" again asked Ronald in a low clear voice.

Still silence. At last Adam Haldane, Colonel Douglas's soldier servant, cleared his throat, and said as if speaking to someone not present—"Puir laddie! —indeed, and if he did it his ain sel', wha is there that will blame him for siccan a sair mischance?"

Ronald put his hand up to his throat, and Fergus held out his arms ready to catch him, but the boy did not fall. He staggered backwards for a step or two, then recovering himself went on quickly to the boat. Only once he spoke as they rowed carefully but quickly across, and that was to say with a great start—"Mother!"

"My puir bairn!" said Fergus, "she kens, she kens; they sent for Colonel Norman."

Yes; Margaret knew. Colonel Douglas had just told her of the accident, and as they reached the

house they met her coming from the garden with a basket of roses still held unconsciously in her hand. Ronald sprang forward with an instinctive wish to shield her for yet a moment longer from the sight that awaited her, but she had no room or power for a single thought of him, far less for any sympathy with his especial share of suffering.

She just waved him away,—mechanically, it may be, but with a look on her face that made the boy rush from her presence with despair in his heart. He dashed upstairs to his own room, and flinging himself face downwards on the bed, hid his eyes from the light. There he remained a long, long time; then suddenly he jumped up as if he could bear it no longer, and hurried down to his father's room. The door was locked, and he could hear low voices speaking within. Ronald tried the handle softly once or twice, and then growing desperate he knocked. Some one moved inside, and the door was opened by Lady Douglas. "Not now," she said, motioning him back "The doctors have just come."

The boy tried to speak, tried to ask a question, but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and as he struggled for utterance the door was softly closed again, and he heard the key turned in the lock. Something seemed to drive him back to his own room.

The evening shadows had gathered, and the hours dragged on. Once or twice he crept to the door, and opening it looked out into the darkness and listened. Everything was perfectly quiet now; the hurried steps had ceased passing up and down below. There seemed no one moving; nothing being carried towards his mother's room. Those who were watching had gathered there; and nothing broke the stillness.

Once Ronald ventured out into the passage, and groped his way towards the stairs. He must hear, he must know; but a sudden chill of horror drove him back. A deadly terror took possession of him; and again, clear before his eyes, his mother's face, his mother's gesture, shaped themselves out of the darkness, and barred his way. He rushed back like one pursued.

In a fresh agony of shivering fear he flung himself down where he had lain before. Perhaps a merciful doze deadened for a while his overtaxed frame. An hour passed, of which he could render no account, and in which he did not suffer.

A step, and the opening of his door roused him. Ronald raised himself on to his elbow with a convulsive start, and saw Norman Douglas standing by his bed. He carried a candle in his hand, and he looked down on Ronald with grave, compassionate eyes.

"My boy," he said, "I think you ought to be with your father now; I have come to fetch you."

"How is he?" whispered Ronald, in the hoarse, choked tone which was all he could command.

"He is sinking fast."

Ronald stood up, grasping at the table to steady himself, and shaken from head to foot with a convulsive shiver.

"Did mother send for me?" he whispered again.

"She has but one thought now," answered his uncle; "she is watching him."

"I can't bear it; oh, Uncle Norman, indeed I can't. Oh, Uncle Norman, you don't know what it is!"

"My boy," said Colonel Douglas, "this is not the moment to be thinking of yourself; think only of your mother. Put away your own share of the trouble, and be a man."

Something in the words reached Ronald's clouded faculties; he straightened himself, stretched his arms above his head for a moment, and went slowly before his uncle out of the door.

Down with hushed footsteps through the silent house, into a room where Lord Douglas's things still lay carelessly about as he had left them that morning when he went out shooting with the boys, and where two doctors stood now by the fireplace waiting and unoccupied. Then on, guided by Norman, into a dim inner room, shaded and silent except for a woman's low voice speaking.

By the bed knelt Lady Douglas, with one hand on her husband's shoulder, and the other holding his hand, while she talked to him, Lady Beatrix bending over her mean time, and trying very gently to draw her away. The latter glanced up as they came behind her.

"He is gone, Norman," she whispered through her tears.

The words fell on Ronald's ears just as for the first time he looked on death; and then, hearing his mother speak, he flung himself back against the wall.

"Darling," she was saying, "do speak to me. Don't, Ronald—don't go away just yet—not like that, without one dear word for me. I know you are soon going; you need not be afraid to tell me. I am very quiet; I know that you are going very, very soon; but say good-bye to Margaret, love, first."

"Dear child, dearest Margaret!" Lady Beatrix said; "come away now; indeed you ought."

Margaret looked swiftly up at her, and then at her husband's face. "I see," she said, in a changed voice, not louder, but with all the fond softness gone from it. And she rose up and stood beside the bed.

Ronald came round from the other side, his arms held out eagerly to her, longing to throw them round her, half with an impulse of protection, half hoping that she would gather him in her arms like a child, and let him sob his heart out on her shoulder.

But as she turned, with an abrupt, dazed movement, she seemed to him, for the second time, to be pushing him away from her. Most probably she neither saw him nor heard his cry of "Mother," but he fell back instantly, and she stood motionless for a time, with her head raised and eyes widely opened, gazing into vacancy. No one moved or spoke. There were only the wild, passionate, heart-broken sobs of the son to break the death-silence, and the stony stillness of the mother, in her majesty of despair.

Lady Beatrix hid her face in an anguish of unavailing pity; and even Norman Douglas bowed his head, and stood for a few moments helpless, in the presence of such sorrow.

Then he went to Lady Douglas, and, putting his arm round her, said quietly, "You must come with me, Margaret;" and she yielded passively, letting him guide her like a blind person into the adjoining room. When she was gone, Ronald fell on the floor on the spot where his mother had been standing.

It was nearly noon on the next day before Lady Douglas left her room. She had not attempted before to go back into the room where she had watched the last night through; but now she rose up silently, as if with a tacit understanding that all was ready for her there.

The windows had been thrown wide open; and so, though the blinds were drawn down, the air raised them a little now and then, and let some

rays of the midday sunshine stream into the room where Lord Douglas lay sleeping his sleep of death. He had always loved the sun, and it did not seem unfit that a bright golden shaft of sunbeams now rested on his hand.

Before daybreak that morning some of those who had waited all the night for the heavy tidings that came with the dawn, had been away up the hills for miles, seeking the one solitary spot where white heather was now in blossom. It was known that every season since their marriage Lord Douglas had brought the first white heath-bells home to his wife. With a rough feeling of poetry they deemed it fit, therefore, that the rare and pure blossom should be gathered for his pillow. It was strewn so thickly round him that he seemed to be resting on the heather bed he had often slept on in the bothy up the hill; only instead of the purple bloom, was the waxy whiteness of this snow-flake among flowers. And over his face also a like change had come—it had grown so pure and stainless under the grand, soft touch of death.

They had left one arm lying across his breast, but the other one was straightened and placed carefully by his side, that the people who had loved him might come and kiss his hand.

Already that morning many kisses and many tears had fallen upon it. Silently—for the sake of her whom they knew to be near at hand, and also for his look of stately peace—men and women in sorrowful succession had knelt down by his side—bearded men bowed with suppressed sobs, and women young and old, who blessed him through their speechless weeping.

It was a rough and simple lying in state, but ennobled by the people's love. His piper, Rory,

who had almost worshipped him, stood at his head, and the old forester was at his feet.

All that happened very early in the morning, almost before the sun had risen above the hills: now the last creaking, laboriously-hushed step had passed away through the still house, and the widow's place was left for her alone.

Rory and Fergus themselves moved from their statue-like attitude, and went softly out of the room as that inner door was opened, and then Margaret Douglas came in and knelt by him again.

But not as before. No words of entreaty that he would speak to her rose to her lips after she looked at him. Ronald was gone! This was not Ronald —this carved and majestic image of a beautiful young man; young as her bridegroom had been; gentle, yet stern; with a grave smile on his lip, and a lofty expression of severe serenity that in his life her husband had never worn.

There was another person who with a fleeter and more noiseless step than either of his companions had hurried away from the bedside when Lady Douglas opened the door. Perhaps Norman Douglas had made a mistake when an hour or two ago he brought the poor boy Ronald, half crazed as he was with sorrow and crushed down with remorse, face to face with his dead father. To Colonel Douglas it had seemed that the sight was most comforting,—most elevating. The "sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection" spoke to him so clearly from that restful face, but on poor Ronald the effect was very different.

He could hardly be persuaded to leave his room for fear of meeting his mother, who, he had a sad conviction, could not bear to have him in her sight. They told him she was quiet, and that half an hour

ago they hoped she had fallen asleep; and then his uncle desired him to go down.

There were whispering voices in the passage as he passed, and a woman's voice broken by weeping, said, "Eh, but it's a sair pity to put him underground, and he sae beautiful."

Ronald scarcely heard or heeded, for his heart was beating loudly with a great boyish fear and awe of death, that for the moment had well nigh blotted out every other feeling. But as he stood beside Fergus at the foot of the bed (they could not get him to go nearer—he, the slayer of his father, must not touch his hand, or kiss his brow); as he stood gazing, with stopped breath, an agony of yearning, and of compassion for the grand manhood wasted, shook him from head to foot.

It was long before he had looked at all; long before he raised his head from the hands in which he buried it as he crossed the threshold. It was only when he felt old Fergus's hand fall on his shoulder pityingly that he looked up. He had thought all would shrink away from him in horror, and he glanced up now surprised at the old man's face, and then his eyes fell on the long straight figure, taller even than in life, lying before him.

From his eyes the look of satisfied peace, that spoke eloquently to Norman Douglas, was quite hidden; he only saw the goodly length of limb; the shapely hand, now rigid; the short, crisp, manly curls; the white heather-bells.

And the woman's words rang in his ears—"A sair pity, a sair pity." Almost maddened by the sharp sting of a trial that it was beyond the power of his age and strength to bear, half delirious fancies were crowding over his brain, and again and again that homely putting into words of his own feeling

echoed in his hearing. He even heard his voice saying the words aloud—"a sair pity"—and then he started at having spoken where everything else was intensely silent. The loneliness of feeling was appalling to him too, for though his uncle had been very tender to him all the night, and patient over his wild bursts of grief, yet he was almost a stranger by comparison, and till now Ronald had been able to carry the burden of any trouble to either father or mother.

Both were gone now—the dead father hardly seemed so far away and lost as the mother whose heart he had broken, and who had twice pushed him from her—so he thought—with horror and loathing in her face.

Dazed and absorbed as he was now, her first touch on the door roused him, and he was gone before she knew that he had been there. He went out of the house, driven by the longing to escape from her eyes, out and away into the hills, climbing higher and higher with a forlorn hope of getting away from his own pain.

They missed him presently from the house, and grew anxious at his absence. Colonel Douglas was very uneasy, and sent to search for him in several directions, but in the evening he came home of his own accord, poor boy, stealing into the kitchen like a thief; weary, exhausted, and thoroughly ashamed of being hungry, even though he was faint and giddy for want of food.

That night his uncle had the comfort of seeing him lying fast asleep, utterly worn out and spent. Norman Douglas stood and watched him, his young features relaxed from the hard rule of pain, and his fair boyish forehead smooth again.

The colour had come back to his cheeks as he slept, and he drew his breath softly and evenly.

When—when awake, would his face wear that untroubled look?

With almost a more profound pity and yearning than that with which Ronald himself had looked a few hours ago on his dead father, Norman Douglas stood by the boy's bed, and thought of the blight that had fallen on his life.

He looked very young to bear the weight of this strange sorrow, as many-sided as it was great and sudden. He was not old even for his age, and had gone deeply into nothing as yet. His very room, slightly furnished, with the cool night wind blowing in through the open and unshuttered windows, was completely a boy's room, with all a boy's treasures scattered about in it. A grandly bound book or two was set up on the drawers; Eton prizes, into which manifestly he had never looked. Hitherto he had been too happy in his out-of-door life at home even to open a book. In fact his whole library consisted of the pocket Testament his mother had told him never to part with when he first went to school; his Prayer-Book, Sir Walter Scott's poetry, Macaulay's Lays, and a stray volume of one of James's novels.

Over his bed an engraving from a picture of his mother, torn out of an old Book of Beauty, was pinned against the wall, and at his feet now lay curled up his dog Sandy, sleepy, winking, yet bound in conscience to keep one lazy eye half open while Norman Douglas stood by his master's bed.

Yes; to Ronald's uncle it was a yet sadder scene than that silent room downstairs.

True, Lord Douglas's sun had gone down while it was yet noon, and in the prime of a noble, happy life, God had called him from his work—well-nigh before the heat and burden of the day had begun for him.

But one hour in the Vineyard—and that a cloudless one—then, unwearied and undaunted, he had gone home to take his wages. No such grief as had already fallen on his young son had ever crossed Lord Douglas's path. How was Ronald to meet it? Would he crush it, or be crushed by it? Would it work good or evil to the nature that, as far as his uncle had been able to read it, as yet seemed pure and generous, but pliant and unformed? Who would help him? The father, who best would have felt with him and for him—who, strong of will and tender of heart, would have set himself with all his might to aid him—his father was gone! Nay, there was the sting—the very core of bitterness, the "sorrow's crown of sorrow"—the father's death most miserably lay at the son's door. His father's death—his mother's widowhood—his ruined home—his youth left unguarded at the moment when his need was the sorest,—his own unconscious hand had wrought that world of woe!

Poor boy, poor boy!—a harsh black shadow verily, to have clouded his morning. A stern battle and a long battle was before him, to be waged with the world that lay outside him, as well as with his own undisciplined heart. From mistaken judgments, from words carelessly cruel, from the miserable notoriety that his story would invest him with,—who would shield him? From the recklessness of despair, or the gloom of despondency, what, and who, would be his aid? His mother?—and there Norman Douglas paused with a sigh.

The next time he went into his nephew's room, which was early the following morning, Ronald was fully awake. If sleep had in one way been merciful to him, in another its effect appeared almost cruel, for he woke up strong and clear, all the confusion

gone from his thoughts, and every power and faculty sharpened into the most intense capacity for suffering.

He lay quite quiet when Colonel Douglas entered, his arms behind his head supporting it, his eyes half open, and his brows slightly drawn together. He did not seem to notice his uncle, who thought it better not to speak to him, but thoroughly alarmed at his fixed look went straight to Lady Douglas's room. Never before had he thought Ronald the least like his mother; but now, when he went up to her, and she turned her white face and steady, glittering eyes towards him, he was struck with her likeness to the poor boy up-stairs, and he began to think that they might at all events meet grief after something of the same fashion.

"Margaret," he said, speaking softly and clearly as though she was a child, "have you rested a little? Are you better to-day?"

"Yes," was the mechanical answer.

"Can you listen to me for a few minutes?"

"Yes."

"I want to speak to you about your boy."

She put out her hand quickly as if to check him, but he took it in his own, and went on speaking in a voice that might have been stern, if it had not been for its deep, underlying compassion. "No, Margaret, you must not try to stop me. I have come on purpose to tell you about him."

"Poor unfortunate boy!" she said, in a suppressed voice.

"Yes, indeed; yes, indeed—unfortunate boy. I want you to think what this is to him. Margaret, my poor broken-hearted child, I tell you that, deeply as I feel for you, and God only knows how deeply that is, —truly as I mourn with you, I am still more sorry for Ronald than for you."

She paused for some time before answering, and then she said, "He is young; his life is all before him."

"His life before him—yes, his life—but what a life! Is life in itself, and by itself, a gift so precious? Is there nothing sad in the thought of a life crushed at the very beginning? If you could see him, Margaret—if you could only look at your boy's poor young face."

She shook her head and shrank back.

"You have a duty left, my child, a great and solemn duty. Our dear fellow there," signing to the next room, "would have been the very first to urge you to fulfil it. Margaret, he left his son to you. You must not let his life be spoilt."

"What can I do for him? what *could* I do?" she asked.

"I don't know, but I think," said the old soldier, simply, "that a kiss from his mother would do him the most good. May I bring him to you, Margaret?" and he took her hand.

"No," she answered; "I will go to him."

She got up and stood in the middle of the room; then she said, without looking at him, "Will you leave me alone a few minutes first, Uncle Norman?"

And so, presently, poor Ronald, still staring at the opposite wall, saw his mother come quietly into his room.

She did not speak, but she walked slowly up to his bedside, and Ronald, with a great gasping, wondering cry of "Mother," flung herself upon her neck, crushing himself convulsively against her, and sobbing out broken words of thanks and sorrow.

"Mother, you here—good, good mother! you oughtn't—oh, mother, mother!"—it always came back to that—"mother, it's so dreadful!"

She let him pull her down upon his bed; and now she folded her arms round him as he lay quivering on her shoulder, and kissed his hair, for his face was hidden; but, alas! there had been a second's quick involuntary shrinking from him, and he felt it.

Very soon he drew himself away from her, and turning his face to the wall, covered it with his arm. His mother understood the action, and her heart ached for him. She hated herself for the icy, iron misery and constraint that held her, but she felt powerless to break through it. She knew it sounded in her voice, and made rigid the very fingers with which she tried to draw away his arm.

"Ronald, poor boy!—I know you are very miserable; I should like to comfort you if I could."

"It's awfully good of you, mother," he whispered, and she saw the big tears drop on to his pillow.

She tried—tried hard to feel softened by them. She dried his wet cheeks softly with her handkerchief, touching him with gentle, motherly hands, but all the time she felt hard, envying him his tears, which were to her as the expression of a grief not too bitter for the relief of weeping.

Ronald lay passive and unresisting, but he no longer, as at first, tried to kiss her hand.

Again Lady Douglas tried "to do her duty" by him, and to utter as well as she could the words she had come here to speak.

"Ronald, in this great trouble that has come upon us there is no blame—no shadow of blame—on anybody. For some reason God has let us be crushed to the earth, but it was the fault of no one—not your fault, Ronald—never think it for a moment. No one can say a word of blame—they will only pity you. God knows I am selfish and bitter in my grief, but

I pity you. I give you all the pity, poor unhappy boy, that I can spare from myself."

"Oh mother, mother," he sighed out; "don't, mother!"

"Yes; it is better I should speak—do you think I mind a little pain more or less?—and we will not speak of this again. But you are very young, and your life must not be spoilt by giving way to a morbid fancy. For it would be morbid; your father would have called it so. He would have told you to be brave, and to overcome it. He was brave, and you are his son. You must try to be like him."

Her voice was growing husky and faint from pain. She ended in a choked whisper: "Live your life and conquer, and I pray God to help you. Only for a little while, Ronald, it is better for both of us not to see each other. I *cannot* bear it."

She bent down again and kissed him, her cheek becoming, if possible, more ashy, more grey, as it touched his; and, with an imperious sign to him not to get up or to speak to her again, she went slowly away.

This time it was Ronald who shrank back from the chill touch of her lips; Ronald's eyes followed her to the door—with a hard look in them for the first time.

Poor woman!—she had done her best, and failed. She had made a great effort in her agony; she had forced herself to speak to him and kiss him, but he only remembered of the interview her shudder as he held her in his arms, and the faint, hoarse words, "We must not meet, I cannot bear it."

They must not meet; she could not bear the sight of him. Yet he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow!

CHAPTER VII

A WORLD WITHOUT A SUN

"How long and dreary is the night,
When I am frae my dearie;
I restless lie fra e'en to morn,
Tho' I were ne'er so weary.
For oh! her lonely nights are lang;
And oh! her dreams are eerie;
And oh! her widow'd heart is sair
That's parted frae her dearie."

THERE was a tract of moorland lying north of Dalbraith, that was wilder, more savage and desolate by far, than any other part of the surrounding country.

You ascended to it by a rugged and stony pass that was all tumbled rock and granite, with a hoarse, though not full torrent flowing painfully along it, with many a fret and check and vexing eddy, over the jagged boulders that made its bed.

It was not a beautiful place, scarcely picturesque, but there was something singularly weird and wild about it, and its savage loneliness was wonderful. Not a tree or shrub was to be seen from one end to another, and generally not a moving thing, with the exception of the grumbling water.

Making your way up to the further end of the strath, which rose gradually into rough natural steps and stairs of granite slabs, you came out at last upon a sweep of country that was hardly less stony and desolate than the glen itself, and which lay in

the heart of the Dalbraith deer-forest. No human habitation lay within keen, except a rude bothy or shooting-lodge, built of the unhewn rocks which lay about, and thatched with heather.

This had been a favourite deer-stalking resort of Lord Douglas's, and in the autumn days that followed his death his son spent many hours there by himself. Foresters and gillies had deserted the spot now. He had no fear of any one's finding him; no stalker came to tell of a grand stag seen on the adjoining hills for the sport of the morrow; no pony with a slain deer roped on his back, followed by men and dogs and cheery voices, would come up the winding path to the door of the bothy.

Ronald could lie undisturbed for hours, on the rocks hard by, where his father had been wont to sit on many an autumn night, watching the stars come out, and the wild solitude fade away into the dusk. Ronald never waited for the darkness now. The place became indescribably eerie to him as soon as the light began to fail. Directly the sun dipped towards the western hills, and tints of pink and lilac crept along the heights, he got up, closed the door of the bothy on to the cold emptiness within, and went away down that darkening pass that looked so strangely melancholy in the dying light.

Sometimes from the summit of the craigs above his head, a stag would stand looking down on him, itself grandly distinct against the sunset sky; sometimes an eagle went soaring majestically over head, and swooped down with his prey into the eyrie that was perched on one of the narrow ledges in the cliff; sometimes, with its mournful cry, a curlew dipped to the water's edge. But Ronald, who a few weeks ago would have been deeply interested in the appearance of each one, never heeded stag or eagle or curlew

now-a-days. He walked on abstractedly, hurrying when the twilight seemed to be creeping on more quickly, then slackening his speed again, as the thought came back of the home that was more dreary still than the twilight world outside. What could he do better than keep away from the silent house, where his mother sat shut up in her own rooms, and where he hated the sight of the one plate that was daily laid for him in the dining-room?

Life, that had seemed to stand still for a while after the great crash, had begun to go on again somehow. People no longer whispered, or walked softly—windows were thrown open to the sunshine; Norman Douglas had gone back to his tower.

Empty and silent as was the house, it seemed to Ronald to be everywhere pervaded by his mother's presence. He fancied she must hear his footstep in the hall—that she saw him when he crept like a thief, as he sometimes ventured to do, into his father's study—that she thought him heartless for eating and sleeping now, as he used to do when Lord Douglas was alive. Poor fellow, he need not have troubled himself about that. Never before in all his life had he been visited by those confused heavy dreams, steeped in misery and terror—never before had he known startled wakings that were full of a vague dread and horror, even before the reality came down upon him in its crushing weight.

The weather changed, and the atmosphere was dissolved in soft mist and rain. Ronald was too much of a Highlander to mind a wet jacket, but the rain prevented him from lying for hours together on the heather, and made his aimless rambles more cheerless than before.

It was only a shade less dreary out of doors than in the house. There the blank and the want of

occupation was complete. He went wandering from room to room, standing still often to gaze with an aching heart at Lord Douglas's guns and fishing-rods, the sight of which was even more sad to the boy's fancy than the great heap of closed books and folded papers on the writing-table. Old Fergus had cleaned all the guns carefully, though now and then a tear had stained the polished steel as he worked, but he put them scrupulously back into their old order, ready for the hand that would never use them again. There they stood, bright and cold, —lifeless, useless, idle, like all else, thought Ronald, from henceforth for ever.

On a table in the hall window lay a big old blotting-book, which used to be always full of Lord Douglas's letters. Ronald opened it one day with a listless hand, and with a mingled wish and fear of finding something left there in his father's handwriting.

But some one had been before him,—every scrap of paper had been taken away,—the only thing left between the leaves was a torn sheet covered with his own half-formed characters. Ronald took it up carelessly, but the colour flushed into his face as he recognised it. It was a copy of Grizel's old family prophecy. He remembered writing it down a year ago, because it haunted him uncomfortably. "When kinsman's blood," he read now, "is shed by kinsman's hand"—why, that had come true! Shuddering, he discovered that he himself had brought about the first part of the doom of Dalbraith. "When kinsman's blood is shed by kinsman's hand"—yes; that had been miserably fulfilled. "When false is true" (he could make nothing of that), "and the loving heart grows cold"—There Ronald dropped the paper, and sat down feeling cold and stunned. Was not the most loving, the noblest heart in all the

world lying now cold in death?—and more, had not his mother's heart turned from him and grown cold?

In his overstrained condition, the foolish old prophecy, which might mean anything or nothing, took an undue hold of his imagination. He felt that he had been overtaken by an inevitable fate; he had only fulfilled that which was his doom, and he must "dree his weird," as Grizel used to say. He did not care to read the rest of the oracular words; there was something he recollected about the "last son of a good father," and "a lassie from the East!"—but all that did not matter to him. The thing was that the prophecy had begun to come true, and that it had been by his means. Ronald brooded over the thought, but to no one in the world would he have been tempted to confess the impression it had made on him.

Meanwhile the weeks slipped away, the Eton holidays had long been at an end, and a good part of the winter half itself was over.

Lady Douglas roused herself at last to the consciousness of this. She did not see her son often, and generally when she did so, it was Colonel Douglas who took him up to her room. Ronald kept out of his uncle's way as much as he could, but Colonel Douglas watched him anxiously, and was disturbed by his increasing listlessness, and by his solitary ways. He spoke about him to Lady Douglas, but he was himself scarcely prepared for her quickly-formed decision, that Ronald must go back at once to Eton.

Colonel Douglas saw that the boy had not at all recovered from the shock of his father's death, and he thought it would be almost cruel to send him, in his half-stunned state, to fight his way in the

world of the great school. But, once aroused to the thought of her son's future, Lady Douglas was inexorable. The idea that his grief must not be suffered to become morbid had taken full possession of her mind. She had a strange shrinking from the thought that any one could share her sorrow. The grief was hers—hers only—an exclusive possession that she guarded jealously.

Ronald must not waste his youth in vain regrets. Why should he? Life was before him still, and hope, and possibly happiness. He had not lost his past, his future, his present, all at one stroke. Yes, she knew, poor fellow, he mourned his great misfortune bitterly, but he would get better among other boys. Work and cricket and all the rest of it would be the best things for him. He must not be encouraged to dwell upon the past; and besides, his education ought not to be neglected any longer. Other sons were not kept at home because their mothers were widowed!

"But," pleaded Colonel Douglas, "surely poor Ronald's is an exceptional case." Lady Douglas turned very pale, and shook her head. She could never bear to hear that Ronald had any especial cause for sorrow; and at last his uncle was compelled to yield the point.

It was a hard task to tell the boy of his mother's decision, and his heart nearly failed him. Ronald was utterly unprepared to return to his former life, every link with which seemed to have been summarily broken. He could not bear to face even the few people at Dalbraith, how was he to go back to Eton in the middle of the half-year with his story fresh upon him. The thought of all the eyes fixed on him in pity or curiosity was unendurable.

He implored his uncle in an agony to get a reversal of the cruel sentence, and Colonel Douglas, feeling for him more deeply than he cared to tell him, did ask, but asked in vain.

Lady Douglas sent herself for Ronald. She held his hand in her chill fingers, and gave him one of the strange kisses which he knew instinctively it cost her an effort to bestow, and she said, "You will do as I wish, Rollo, because I ask you, and because I know that it is right."

He only said "Yes, Mother," with quivering lips, and after that he uttered no word of pleading or complaint.

Colonel Douglas went with him to London. Ronald left home very quietly, and whatever was his dread of the ordeal before him, he kept it locked in his own heart.

"Good-bye, my dear," the old soldier said when they parted; "be strong, and brave, and manly. I don't think that in all my life I ever needed courage as much as you do now. Ask God to give it you, Ronald, and He will. Say your prayers, my boy, and do your best."

And then he kissed Ronald, and the boy saw that there were tears on the grey eyelashes.

The might of winter's dreariness presently settled over Dalbraith.

It came down upon the Highlands that year in storm and tempest, with loud gales and pelting hail-storms, and frozen mists that blotted out the hills.

At night the winds lifted up their voices, and came sobbing, moaning, shrieking round the lonely house, until sleep was well nigh impossible, and the inmates lying wakeful and listening to the strong blasts that shook the windows and howled down

the wide chimneys, almost believed that spirits in pain must be abroad upon the wind.

And then the snow fell, and lay, not smooth and brightly glistening, but tossed about and heaped up, so that there was danger in the deep, treacherous drifts, and in other places patches of black earth, swept bare by the wind, lay naked and unsheltered from the frost.

And while the storms raved outside, the stillness that seemed born of death reigned within the house. It was well for Margaret Douglas that there were none but old servants at Dalbraith—tried and faithful men and woman, who loved her for herself, or for the name she bore; for that winter, in the storm-besieged house, with the armies of snow and frost that beleaguered it on every side, and the garrison of deadly grief within, was enough to break down the most buoyant spirits.

As Dalbraith House lay low the snow-drifts round it were very deep; the burn was buried in snow, and the roads impassable. It was not even always possible to keep open the communication with the clachan. No winter had been like this one since Lady Douglas came to the Highlands as a bride. How the intense loneliness and the bitter cold affected her during those early months of her widowhood it was difficult for any one to guess—they had given up entreating her to go away. As far as they could see, she did not take much heed of the weather, and they could not tell if it was the wind she was listening to as she sat hour after hour silent and unemployed.

They supposed she must be thinking, from the abstracted look in her eyes, and from the way she sometimes lifted her hand up to her forehead, holding it there for a few minutes, and then letting

it fall again heavily on to her knee. Sometimes they fancied she was living her life over again in memory, and that the past was actually more real to her than the present.

Once a week Ronald wrote to her, short, unmeaning letters, that it cost him hours of misery to compose—and she always answered them immediately; though when Dalbraith was fairly snowed up, and the letters ceased to come, she showed no sign of missing them.

In her letters she never made any allusion to the changed aspect of everything at home. She told him how deep the snow was, and that she and the people he inquired after were well. Then she commented on his school news, and said that it gave her pleasure to hear he was working hard.

For Ronald had gone back to Eton with his uncle's words about manliness and true courage ringing in his ears. Everybody was very kind and considerate, and in some ways things were easier than he expected. He threw himself into his work as he had never done before, in the vague hope that it might please or comfort his mother, and perhaps help him to forget himself. It was weary drudgery; but he had no heart for the old games or the boating, and one must do something, he supposed.

Once, when the half was drawing near its close, he mentioned the Christmas holidays in one of his letters, and ventured, after many doubts, to say something about hoping he should see her soon. The answer came quickly, and was very decided. He was not to go home for Christmas; she was writing to Sandysmere to arrange that he should spend the holidays there. It would not be worth while for him to take the long journey to the High-

lands in the depth of so rough a winter; besides, in every way it was better he should not come. She begged that he would obey her wishes without question.

Colonel Douglas looked very grave when he was told of this. He was anxious about Ronald as well as about Margaret, and he thought it was not right or wise thus to banish the boy from his own home. Nevertheless, there was something in Lady Douglas's rigid, and at times, almost trance-like state, that made them all fear to rouse her, almost as one would dread breaking the long sleep of a sick person after the crisis of an illness. It ended by Colonel Douglas going up again to London, and taking both Ronald and Kenneth abroad with him for the Christmas holidays.

But there was one person who could no longer refrain herself. When Grizel Douglas heard that Margaret still chose to be alone; that the Christmas-tide, so often a frightfully wild and dark season in those northern regions, was to roll over the solitary house of Dalbraith with no kindred voice to give the greetings of the holy time, no familiar face to break the spell of empty desolation, her heart burned within her.

That there are sorrows which are not ripe for comfort, she knew, but scarcely understood. At all events, the picture of Dalbraith, with its frost-bound moors, and white peaks, and death-stricken house, came between her and her rest. Her heart sickened at the merry voices and youthful mirth surrounding her in the house near Edinburgh, where she had been bidden to see the old year out and the new year in. She must needs go to Margaret and comfort her.

Neither distance nor snow-drifts could daunt her. She set out resolutely on one of the short

December days, and the delays in the tedious winter journey only troubled her because, once upon the way, she persuaded herself that each day which kept her away from Margaret was a loss. There was so much she would fain say to her—much that she felt dimly stirring in her own heart and striving for expression—such a yearning desire to "exhort" Margaret, and to show her how a sorrow never should be wasted.

At last she reached Dalbraith. After all, Lady Douglas was not quite alone. Of late she had become more restless, pacing up and down her room for hours together. And her old servants, getting frightened as they heard her footsteps passing to and fro, long after midnight, and on into the dark morning hours, took the matter into their own hands and sent for Lady Beatrix.

It was a rough journey in this wild weather for the frail old lady, made partly on a sledge that was pushed across the frozen loch, partly in a rude litter borne through the snow-filled glen on the shoulders of sturdy Highlanders, who had carried her off from her own house almost by force, in the hope that she would bring rest and sleep to their lady.

But though she came right bravely and willingly, she knew beforehand that she could do no good.

Margaret had judged wisely for herself. She was one of those rarely-constituted persons who can best do battle by themselves with the unavoidable agony of regret. She greeted her uninvited guest gently; she put a force upon herself, and sat quietly, staying her monotonous wandering from room to room. She let the old lady sit by her holding her hand, and talking now and then in her soft, musical voice.

But Lady Beatrix saw that it was only a constraint, and after some hours, she said: "They meant well, Margaret, your kind people who fetched me here, but you know best, dear child. Tell me, shall I stay or go?" Margaret looked down into the sweet, fair, old face, she took up one of Lady Beatrix's little, white, withered hands, and kissed it passionately, but she said in a whisper, "Go."

It was impossible, however, to say the same to poor Grizel, when she arrived that same day, half frozen, and filled with love and zeal, from the other end of Scotland. She was so earnest, so humble, so overflowing with a boundless grief and pity as she looked into the changed face of that Margaret, whom she had been wont to describe proudly as the one perfectly happy person in the world.

Lady Beatrix lost her calmness too, and could not help crying as poor Grizel knelt at her cousin's feet, kissing her unresisting hands, and pouring on her every tender name in tones that were broken and almost choked with tears.

Margaret scarcely showed any surprise at seeing her, and the plans Grizel had laid anxiously with old Angus in the hall, that her coming should be broken to Lady Douglas gradually, proved quite unnecessary. Angus went away shaking his head and grumbling, when Grizzy broke down at the first sight of Margaret, forgetful of, or faithless to, the promise she had made outside the door, that she would be "just perfectly calm."

It was Margaret who was calm, and who looked at her with the half-impatient wonder that an open show of sorrow always seemed to awake in her. As yet sympathy was powerless to touch her.

" And oh, my Margaret," said Grizel, drying her eyes, and blundering uncompromisingly into the middle of what she longed to say—" You see, my Margaret, that something wonderful is meant by all this; the loving God would not send such a sorrow without a meaning."

" Maybe," said Margaret, lifting her large pain-wearied eyes listlessly for an instant.

" You see it; then that is something gained, my bonnie dear—something to comfort us. No pain is useless; we are to learn from it, dear Margaret; to learn."

" I do not care to learn; let me be, Grizel," as the earnest " Eh, Margaret, love? " was repeated the second time.

" But you would love to learn God's grand secret lesson," persisted Grizel, laying her hand on Lady Douglas's arm, " and then the bitter pain, oh, my bairn, the bitter, bitter pain would not be wasted."

Margaret put away the hand, not impatiently, but as if the words did not move her.

" I can't bear to see aught wasted," said Grizel, " not so much as a candle-end, and when I see it burning in a wrong place, I just long to move it; and so I cannot bear to think that your burning pain is not shedding some light into your poor heart, dear Margaret. Do you understand me? "

" No," said Margaret, with a weary dazed movement of the head.

" It was a kind of a wee parable, though I didn't see it myself at first," explained Grizel, rather pleased. " Let me try to show you—"

But Lady Beatrix softly took her hand. " Let the good God teach her, Grizel," she said in her tender voice. " Perhaps He can do it best when we are silent."

"If we are not wasting opportunities," replied honest Grizel, "but we are bounden to do all we can; and our poor Margaret—"

Again Lady Beatrix stopped her. "Dear Grizel, we can always pray," she said.

And Grizel went away into her own room, and prayed with tearful eyes that before Margaret's sorrow was taken away, she might be taught its lesson.

Lady Beatrix prayed too, silently, and there rose before her closed eyes the vision of a stormy sea, with waves that lifted angrily, and of a labouring boat over which those waves were breaking, for the wind was contrary, and the men toiled in rowing. Awhile ago, as she looked on the sorrowful face over which the waves of trouble had beaten cruelly, pitilessly, the despairing prayer rose to her lips, "Lord, save us, we perish." But now (even though the words had been faithless), as of old, they were heard and answered. The calm Figure of One who carried Divine comfort in His Hand rose before her eyes, and the reproachful yet pitying voice seemed to be saying to her, "O thou of little faith, wherefore did'st thou doubt?"

Looking back at Margaret she saw that, lulled by the quiet and the tender holding of her hand, the calm of sleep had stolen over her.

"Dear Grizel," said Lady Beatrix, when she was leaving Dalbraith next day, and there was dewy brightness in her dark soft eyes, "Dear Grizel, I am glad to leave you here, and I think God sent for you."

So the two women lived on alone together through the winter. Lady Douglas took her cousin's coming very quietly; she even thanked her for it once, and said she was glad, for that now her own people

would be more at rest about her. They were in Italy this winter, and it was impossible for Lord Sandysmere to face the cold of Scotland, or for his wife to leave him.

So they lived on alone, a monotonous and silent life. To Grizel it was not so utterly dreary as might have been supposed. She was useful, and that alone was to her as the breath of life. And as in her simple creed it was wrong and rebellious to grieve overmuch, she opened her heart willingly to such bits of comfort and cheering as lay within her reach.

The dear one who was gone had been taken to a brighter world; to the kind old heart that had loved him it was great consolation to speak of him and hear about him. That there were none like him left, that his noble life only grew brighter as it neared its end, that he was ready even for a change so sudden;—was it no comfort that all so spoke of him,—that all had loved him,—that he had been mourned as few are mourned in death? It was, to Grizel. And to gather up his words, to hear of the chance acts, the looks, the smiles of those days when he was standing all unconscious, face to face with death; to know which dog it was whose rough head he had last smoothed with his hand; the hour when he had come down the turret-steps; what he said to Fergus as he went out into the sunshine with his gun over his shoulder; the very gesture with which he had waved a farewell to his wife, as she leant out of her window to see him go—all these things Grizel cared to know, and treasured in her heart—simple chronicles repeated, ah, how often! by the people who had loved him.

The months wore on; Ronald had not come home at Easter, but he was coming at Midsummer,

which now was close at hand. Nobody spoke much about it to his mother. Grizel and Lady Beatrix talked of it together in whispers, wondering how it would all be. Was his mother watching for him—she who spoke no word? What welcome would she give her only son when he returned? And Ronald himself, would he, boy-like, have outlived his bitter sorrow?—would he be much changed?

How was it?—had he changed much?

He was older-looking, and he had grown more silent, much more silent. His life among comparative strangers had forced on him a power of outward reticence and self-command, and the interests of the world in which he lived thrust themselves of necessity upon him.

There were moments when, in the broad light of everyday life, the past almost looked to him like a ghastly dream; there were others when it started up again into vivid and present reality.

One of these sudden shocks came to him one day that he was by himself in his boat on the river. It was a whole holiday, and as he rowed quickly, he overtook another boat full of people who were talking and laughing merrily. There were two or three ladies, and a couple of Eton boys, whose "people" having come down to see the place, were being shown, as its crowning glory, the broad, silvery Thames, dotted over with boats, as it especially is on a holiday in summer.

Ronald exchanged a greeting with his schoolfellows, as his light boat went skimming past them, and then a reedy bend in the river hiding him from their view, he stopped, intending to let them get ahead of him again.

As he did so their voices clearly reached him; their boat was moving very slowly.

"Who was that boy, Reg?" said a girl's voice. "He had such a nice face, I thought."

"That? oh, that was Douglas; he is a very good-looking fellow, isn't he?"

"Is he a friend of yours?" asked some one else.

"Well, yes, he used to be. One does not see so much of him now. I daresay you have heard about him. He shot his own father last year."

"Oh, poor, poor fellow!" exclaimed a very compassionate voice.

"On purpose?" asked another, in shocked and awe-struck tones.

"Nonsense, Tiny. On purpose!—of course not. How can you talk such nonsense? It was an accident out shooting."

"Oh, I remember all about it," said a fresh speaker. "It was a terrible thing. His poor mother! Was that young Douglas? I wasn't looking when he passed. I should like to have seen him."

"Is he very miserable?" asked the girl they called Tiny. "I wonder he could ever hold up his head again."

"I say, look out—hush!" as the boat now rounded the river-bend and came full upon Douglas's skiff drawn up near the bank.

For a moment both oarsmen stopped rowing in blank dismay, the next they sent their boat forward with a sudden spring that speedily put several reaches of shining water between it and Ronald's.

"There, Tiny; I wish you would not speak so loud," said Reg. "I declare he heard."

"Oh, no, no," cried Tiny.

"I tell you he could not help himself. He heard quite well; of course he did."

"Perhaps he did not, Reg. I daresay he wasn't listening," and the girl who had first spoken leant

forward and took Tiny's hand in hers, for she had become quite white with compunction and regret.

"What shall we do?" again asked Reg.

"Make mother ask him to dinner at the Christopher," suggested the other boy.

"By the bye, yes, the very thing;" and before his mother had time to stop him, Reg had started up in the boat, and was shouting out—"I say, Douglas, my mother wants you to come and dine at the Christopher this evening."

Ronald had pulled his straw hat over his eyes, and was apparently quite intent on getting his boat back into mid-stream. He made no answer till another shout of "Douglas!" compelled him to look round, and then he only said, "Thanks, I can't."

Reg was beginning a remonstrance, but he was pulled down again into the boat, all his relations calling to him, "Don't, Reg; be quiet, Reg!" at once.

Ronald's skiff glided away towards Eton, and that was the end of the matter as far as Reg was concerned. Five minutes afterwards he had forgotten all about it.

But Ronald hurried up to his own room. He had heard, sure enough, both the thoughtless questions and the carelessly-given answers.

Was this the way his misfortune was handled by the outside world?—told lightly to curious strangers, wondered at, pitied, and misunderstood. "Did he do it on purpose?" Ronald repeated the words half aloud—on purpose! So that was what people thought.

And somebody else in the boat said she was sorry she had not seen him; and then they asked him to

dinner, that they might look at him, he supposed, as much as they liked. He wondered that they cared to have anybody to dinner who they thought might have shot his father on purpose—and he burst out into a laugh that was much more like a sob.

And this was how all his friends were talking! He had fancied they never told the story to any one, and thought of it only in respectful silence. Well, he knew better now. They told everybody that came to Eton who he was, and what had happened to him. All his life he must be pointed out like this, and invited to dinner by people who asked whether he did it on purpose.

That little foolish speech cut him to the heart more than all the rest. He could not forget it. The night that followed was as miserable an one to Ronald as any of those he had gone through just after his father's death. He paced up and down the tiny room, pushing aside the table, and dashing his one chair out of the way, and crossing from door to window in a couple of strides.

"She wondered how I could ever hold up my head again," he said to himself. "She was right there. I wonder at it too. I don't think I can stand it all much longer. 'Is he miserable?' that girl said. I should like her to try what it feels; I don't think she would care for it very much. If it was not for mother, I would just bolt, and go to some place where nobody ever heard of me before; but I suppose Uncle Norman would call that cowardly!" and then Ronald stopped and sat down on his bed, leaning forward on the table with his eyes covered with his hands, and there he remained a long while without moving, except for a deep sigh now and then.

That little scene on the river shook his confidence in his friends, and the rest of the half year passed heavily.

It was brightened only by the thought that at last he was going home. Dalbraith was Dalbraith after all, saddened and shadowed though it might be. There was no place in the world like it. There too he should have the comfort and relief of being alone again, without the fear of people watching him, or the haunting fancy that whenever two of his companions were whispering together, they were talking about him.

Above all, Ronald's whole heart turned to his mother. Since he had been for so long entirely among strangers who could have no sympathy with either of them, the bond of their common sorrow seemed to have grown so strong that it must needs draw them close together. No one else could feel as they two did. Surely his mother would be glad to see him, and that dreadful shadow that had been between them would be forgotten. Perhaps she was even waiting for him to comfort her; at least she would let him try. The blank despair of a little while ago was lessened by this hope.

He would not be discouraged even when a letter came from Lady Douglas, advising him to spend his holidays once more in England. She did not forbid his coming home, but she feared he would find it dreary work, she wrote, for Dalbraith was changed and she herself kept much to her own rooms.

Ronald's only answer to this was to fix the time of his arrival.

CHAPTER VIII

THROWN AWAY

" But when the mither cam' to hear it
She said, ' Ye disobedient son,
I've gie'n you learnin', I've gie'n you schulin',
And will you to your ruin run? ' "

" BRING some peats and light them up," said Grizel Douglas; " we must not have the callant coming home to a cold hearth-stone."

But the peats that evening were damp and would not burn. They soon crumbled down to dull red.

Everybody knows how lovely and how fickle is a Highland summer. Now sunshine on the heather —now rain upon the moss.

In the North, Queen Summer is seldom suffered to hold her throne and sceptre undisturbed. Those rebel chiefs—the mighty wind, the sullen rain—rise up often in revolt against her sway; and Winter, her harsh impatient heir, sends down storm and cloud and tempest, to tear from her, if so he may, that crown that he will wear full surely, when she has laid down to sleep, among the flowers of summers that are dead.

It was a very dark stormy night on which Ronald reached Dalbraith. One solitary light glimmered from a window in the house; otherwise he could scarcely have traced its dark outline rising out of the gloom. The bell at the turret-door echoed noisily, but it was a long time before he could hear foot-

steps within coming to answer it. In old time the door would have been flung open long before the dog-cart reached the crest of the brae, and his father would have been standing on the threshold.

It seemed as if a shadow waited there now, and that it fell upon him as he passed in. Old Angus coming at last, grasped his outstretched hand silently, and then welcomed him home as if by an afterthought. Ronald thanked him, and stood hesitating, thinking of the joyous rush that would have taken him half over the house, formerly, in less time than this.

" Where is my mother? " he asked in a low voice; " am I to go to her? "

" In the tower-room, Master Ronald," whispered back the old man, " and you'd best be going there at once."

Grizel's peat fire had sunk to a glimmer, and the hall was not lighted. There was a dim lamp burning at the further end of the gallery beyond, and as he walked slowly down it he heard the moan of the wind, as if it was praying for entrance at each window, and the rain-drops splashing down.

At the door of the turret-room he stood still and waited, listening for some movement within. Surely in that silent house his mother must have heard the bell, and it would be so much easier to greet her if he found her coming out to meet him. But nothing stirred; so presently he opened the door gently, and looked in. The room was dimly lighted, like the rest; only a pair of wax-candles stood on the writing-table, and his mother was standing near the chair from which she had just risen, and looking towards the door.

" Oh! is it you? " she said, coming forward quickly; " I thought I heard the bell. What a bad

night for your journey. Poor fellow, how wet you are!" and she passed her hand over his soaked sleeve. "You ought to change your things at once."

"Presently—it does not matter, mother."

A feeling of utter shyness and constraint came upon him. His mother's quivering face and quick words, the trembling of her hand on his arm, and the attempt to treat this as if it were but an ordinary meeting, made him feel like a stranger in a strange house.

She busied herself in stirring the fire into a blaze, but the fire-irons rattled and fell out of her shaking hands, so she sat down, clasping them together on her black dress. The candlelight shone on her, and Ronald saw how grief had beaten all traces of youth out of her face. He stood silent, with something like an iron hand grasping at his throat. His mother spoke again directly, ringing the bell with nervous haste. "You must want something to eat. Rory,"—as the door opened,—"is supper ready for Lord Douglas?"

Ronald had perforce become used at Eton to hearing himself called by his father's name, but he winced as he heard it first from his mother. She slightly raised her voice as she pronounced it, as if determined not to spare herself, and she tried to steady the lips which would quiver with the pain. It may have been right that she should face the inevitable at once. It was inevitable, but it was unfortunate for Ronald. Who knows how much her dread of meeting him was increased by knowing that she must call him by that name, which she would fain have buried with jealous silence in her heart?

It was part of her plan to face the pang at once. In those long months she had thought deeply,

resolutely, and sternly. Out of the ruins of joy and love had risen a strange, hard, perverted ideal, which she called Duty.

Duty had ever been the key-note of Colonel Douglas's gentle yet lofty teachings. Margaret had fastened on the letter of his words, and let the spirit go. She would yield to no softness, would flinch before no pain; only what she renounced for herself she would not tolerate in others. Neither Ronald nor any one else must draw back where she could tread with an unfaltering step.

But, poor woman, she overrated her strength. In some of her words and ways there was the unconscious cruelty of weakness.

On this evening she sat opposite to Ronald while he stumbled hurriedly through his supper, hungry after his long journey, yet choking over every morsel he tried to swallow with her eyes upon him.

"I am afraid, my boy," she said, when he had finished, "that you have made a mistake in coming home. It is lonely here now, and you will be dull."

"Mother," and he came round and knelt beside her chair, "don't say such things; I wanted to be with you."

"You must not think of me, Douglas."

"Oh! he cried, "cannot you call me Ronald?"

A light flashed up suddenly in her eyes. "No, I can't. Leave me at least his name." Then, as she saw him draw back, she checked herself and took his hand. "My boy, be reasonable," she said.

"Am I unreasonable?" he asked, with a swelling heart.

To this she made no answer; but presently saying that she would leave him now to have a little talk

with Grizel before he went to bed, she kissed him on the forehead, and went away.

Grizel had been keeping discreetly aloof in her own room that she might not disturb the meeting between Margaret and her son; but she had not been able to resist creeping in to see the boy eat his supper. Ronald turned to her after his mother was gone, and with a burning blush that covered his whole face, he asked, in a low voice, "Grizel, does my mother hate me?"

"Hate you, hate *you*, Ronald? Whist, whist, my bonny man; how should she hate you that are the whole she has left on earth—her one bairn—her hope—and her joy that will be, by and bye, when the days of her mourning are accomplished? Ronald, laddie, you should not speak like that."

"She cannot forget," murmured Ronald, leaning his head on the chimney-piece, and turning his face away from Grizel.

"Forget, and how would she forget?—she cannot look at you without remembering—you, the innocent cause, my poor, dear boy——"

Ronald stopped her with a gesture of his hand. "Oh, don't," he groaned.

"Give her time, Ronald; give your poor mother time. It is but natural; she never sees you yet but she thinks of that awesome day."

"Grizel, be quiet; you nearly drive me out of my mind," said poor Ronald; "and yet I rather think you are a comfort."

"Am I, am I?" cried Grizel, with tears of pleasure in her eyes; "am I really a bit of a comfort to you? I can't do much, Ronald; but I would die for you to-morrow, gladly."

But though honest Grizel did her best to cheer him, she was scarcely better able in her simplicity

than he was to understand the subtlety of grief, its strange wish for self-torture, its wilful monopoly of suffering.

Only the next day came another jar between Ronald and his mother. They had been talking over his school-life together, and discussing the prospects of the next half. Lady Douglas had got a letter from his Eton tutor, which she gave him to read, telling him, in warm words, of the pleasure it had given her.

Ronald was leaving her at last, somewhat comforted and re-assured; but as he reached the door she called him back. It was a glorious day after the rain, and the August sunshine was pouring in at the windows.

"By the way," she said, speaking quickly, and holding the open letter so as to shade her face, "I wanted to remind you that the 12th will soon be here. You had better see Fergus, and make your arrangements with him about your shooting."

"Mother!" called out Ronald, sharply, as if she had given him a blow.

She heard his exclamation and the horror in his voice, but she would not look at him.

"Yes," she continued; "you must settle these things for yourself now, I cannot look to them for you."

He recovered himself by a great effort, and spoke quietly, but very sadly. "Mother, can you think—you—can you imagine that I—*I* could shoot again?"

She looked up quickly, growing paler, if it were possible, than before. "That is foolish; I want you to have no morbid feeling, no false sentiment. Why, what difference can it make? Go out at once, and face it; I tell you I wish it. Do you suppose such a trifle as that makes any difference to me?"

"I don't know, mother; how can I tell?" he answered, with the bitterness that she was teaching him. "What do I know of your sorrow? I only know that I can't do it, and I won't."

"But if I wish it?"

"I wasn't thinking of you," said Ronald, roughly.

She looked at him again. Perhaps she saw how deeply she had wounded him, for she spoke more gently. "My boy, I only spoke for your good; things are no easier because we put them off. I have told you this before. You must not brood over the past. At your age trouble cannot go very deep; turn away from it; leave it to those who cannot even wish to escape from it. Go out and enjoy yourself."

"Mother," he said, "you are too cruel."

He stood by the window; the tears he was too proud to let fall burning in his eyes, and the hot iron of injustice sorching in upon his soul. Those were bad moments in the boy's life.

"I do not mean to be cruel," she answered; "I wish you to be reasonable, and strong, and sensible, ready to face the shadow that has fallen on your life, and so to dispel it. A boy like you should not shrink before a little pain. Go out bravely; only the first day or two can be hard at your age."

"As there is a God in heaven," broke out Ronald, passionately; "and as He sees and judges, I swear that never in my life shall my hand take a gun in it again—my hand that killed my father! Uncle Norman," for Colonel Douglas had opened the door as he began to speak, "I call you to witness my solemn oath."

Lady Douglas silently left the room.

"You are too vehement, Ronald," said his uncle, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"I cannot stand it," continued Ronald, his face all aflame with pain and anger; "I won't be treated so;" but Colonel Douglas checked him with a look and tone that had in them more sternness than his thoughts.

"Ronald, you are speaking of your mother."

"And *he* was my father," answered Ronald, with a bitter sob; "and she thinks I am not worthy to be called his son."

"You had better say no more now," said his uncle, trying to hide his pity and sympathy; "go out, and I will speak to your mother."

But Margaret, when he went, hot with indignation, to her room, met his rebuke with a humility and a pathos that disarmed him. "What can the poor fellow do here," she asked, "if all amusement is cut off from him?—and, Uncle Norman, his father wanted him to love Dalbraith."

"But so soon, Margaret; and his dear father has only been gone a year."

"Only a year," she echoed, with a world of dreary meaning in her voice.

Colonel Douglas stood sorrowfully aside, all the more conscious of his powerlessness to help, because he saw both sides so clearly. He understood the effort Margaret had made, her mistaken attempt to do her duty by her son, and her chilled, shocked feeling at the outburst which had met her. Neither could he wonder at Ronald, or blame him, for doubting his mother's love.

Lady Douglas did not try again to interfere with his pursuits, and for a time he held himself proudly and coldly aloof from her; but the boy's heart, after all, yearned for his mother, and he seemed to have made a resolve that he would try once more to win back his place with her. He was patient

almost beyond his years, courting her as a knight of old would have courted his lady, with humble, wistful service. And in her blindness she threw it all away.

Norman Douglas was almost in despair. He used to pace up and down the little morning-room at the Lady's Lodge. "I can do no more," he said; "it is of no use. For all her imposing ways I sometimes think our poor Margaret is no better than a spoilt child."

"She has been used to so much love," pleaded Lady Beatrix; "she does not know how to live without it."

"And so she throws away God's last good gift? Ah! dear Lady, nothing would ever have made you bitter or unjust."

But much as he pitied Ronald, Colonel Douglas had no intention of letting him become listless and idle. He ordered him out fishing, and watched him anxiously, until he saw that, even in spite of himself, the glorious sport was throwing its spell over him. The solitary excitement, the dash of the falling river or the stillness of its deep salmon pools, the gloom upon the water when clouds were overhead, the sudden glints of often unwelcome sunshine, the mad moments of excitement that made up twenty times for the hours of patient waiting—all these met Ronald's unspoken need; and the great mother, Nature, gathered him kindly to her mighty heart. Duncan, the fisherman, was an apathetic, taciturn Highlander, whom nothing short of a big fish could galvanise into life; but he was a master of his craft,—and Ronald being endowed with all the patient coolness, the steadiness of nerve and presence of mind that is necessary to a good fisherman, Duncan thought it worth while to take

great pains with his education. But he never exulted openly, or gave his pupil a single word of praise.

One day Grizel burst upon them on the river-side, wading through a sea of dripping bracken and heather, and sending several stones thundering down into the water as she clambered down the bank. Sympathy in whatever he had in hand was by nature so welcome a thing to Ronald, that he even greeted Grizel gladly now, though her advent seemed likely to put an end to his chances for that day. She arrived, loudly promising silence, and her "whist-whist" in answer to Ronald's whispered caution seemed to awake the echoes in the opposite craigs, and only to lose itself among the distant rocks. But the deep interest in her face, its puckered anguish when Duncan gravely proposed to give up and go home for to-day her wild delight when a fish (surely the most deaf of his species) was hooked at last, disarmed Ronald, and it was a pleasure to him to show his prowess before such enthusiastic eyes. There was no holding Grizel as the salmon rushed and plunged, and Ronald followed him down the stream. She tore along, stumbling over the rocks, clinging to the stems of overhanging trees, entangling herself wildly with Ronald's rod, and all but taking a header into a rocky pool just as Duncan, his face expressing unutterable things, was drawing in the salmon with his landing-net. Ronald leant against a tree, and laughed till the glen rang again; and the sun streaming out all at once (for it was a day of cloud and storm, with flitting gleams and shadows), lighted up his face with a ray of yellow gold. Duncan had withdrawn in dudgeon behind a rock, round which the river swept just there with a swifter eddy, and Grizel

came plunging up the bank, stamping the water out of her wet boots, and looking up at Ronald with delight.

"Eh, you may laugh, Ronald, but I just wish your mother could get a sight of you now, with the light in your eyes, and looking like the blithe laddie of a year ago."

Hapless Grizel!—she wondered why the gloom fell suddenly over his face again, just as the swift storm-shadow settled down on the hill-top.

Ronald felt weary of it all. If it had not been for the fishing he would scarcely have had any regrets when the holidays came to an end, and he had to go back to Eton for his last half. Colonel Douglas had gone away, and Ronald went but seldom to the Lady's Lodge. His old childish familiarity with Marion had passed away, and she had grown shy and grave with him. Kenneth was reading with a private tutor in the south of England. And things never would go straight between Ronald and his mother.

Only a few days before his departure, he was told one morning, much to his surprise, that two young gentlemen had arrived and were "speiring" for him. Going round to the front of the house in great perplexity, he found his unexpected visitors waiting for him on the steps; for Rory, unused to people coming to call, and, in truth, rather indignant that any one should, under present circumstances, make an attempt to do so, had not invited them to go inside the door. They were two young fellows, with knapsacks over their shoulders; one a school-fellow of Ronald's, the other his sailor-brother, whom Ronald had seen once or twice at Eton. Greetings and explanations were exchanged. The two brothers were making a walking tour

through the Highlands, where everybody had been "tremendously" kind to them, and hearing that Dalbraith was not far from the Inn where they were staying for a couple of days, they had come over to look Douglas up.

Boys are as hospitable as Arabs, and there is, besides, a sort of free-masonry among Etonians that makes them claim each other's friendship as a matter of course, however and wherever they may meet.

It was quite impossible for Ronald to turn these two away. He flushed hotly at the bare thought, and yet how could he make his mother understand? Leaving his guests in the hall, he ran up to her room, and told her hurriedly that he must ask them to stay one night. "I could not help it, you see, mother; I'm very sorry—indeed, I could not help it."

She looked at him for a few minutes without speaking.

"Very well," she said, at last.

"You won't mind much, mother, will you?" he began again, getting more and more embarrassed. "Of course, I don't like it at all myself; but what could I do? You see it isn't my fault, don't you?"

She bent her head a little, and said "Yes."

"And they won't be in your way, you know, mother."

"Of course not," she rejoined quickly.

He lingered, longing to give her a kiss, or to put his arm round her, or in some way to prove that he was not disregardful of her. He was trembling from head to foot himself, with a sort of nervousness and dread of these guests—his own first guests at Dalbraith.

But Lady Douglas was bending over a book she held open on her lap, and her face was turned

away from him. Ronald did not venture to go up to her, neither did he like to go away, so he remained standing awkwardly near the door. She did not notice him. "Good-bye, mother," he said at last.

"Good-bye, Douglas," she answered, in a low voice.

He went out and closed the door after him gently, and stood in the passage twisting his hands together, hating to go down, dreading having to face his friends; angry with them for coming; rebelling in his heart against the unnatural dreariness of his life. He dimly understood, too, that it was a bitter moment for his mother, in which the outside world broke for the first time upon the silence of that mourning house.

At last he went downstairs with a rush, and opened the hall-door. There they were waiting for him, the sailor sitting in Lord Douglas's great carved chair, his brother balancing a Highland claymore in his hand; and both looking so frankly unconscious of being in any one's way, so sure of their welcome, and of their host's delight at their arrival, that for a moment he stood still without knowing whether he was most provoked with them for not knowing better, or pleased at their want of perception.

"My mother does not see strangers—visitors, I mean," he said, coming forward and speaking rather stiffly, "but she hopes you will enjoy yourselves. What would you like to do?"

"Let us go out. I suppose we couldn't go after the grouse?" suggested Frank Giffard, the Etonian.

"I never shoot," answered Ronald, sharply and shortly.

To do the two young men justice, neither of

them knew much of the real state of the case. Frank had not been at Eton when Ronald's father died, and though he had heard the story, he had nearly forgotten it, while his brother Harry was out in China at the time. Some remembrance of the accident and its especial sadness suddenly dawned upon them.

"I say, old fellow," exclaimed the sailor, jumping up and putting his hands on Ronald's shoulders, "isn't there a screw loose somewhere?—we ought not to have come, ought we?—hadn't we better make ourselves scarce as fast as we can?"

"No, no, indeed; I'm particularly glad to see you. It's uncommonly jolly of you to come;" and Ronald spoke all the more heartily for his previous coldness, and felt all the more heartily too. "It's capital having you both. I'll tell you what —we'll go out fishing. It's a first-rate day. I know you like fishing, Giffard."

"Rather—I believe you," echoed Frank; "but is it all right? Are you sure you like to fish?"

"Yes, yes; I'm always at it. Come along, and we will find the fishermen."

Half an hour afterwards the three passed under Lady Douglas's window. It was open, and Ronald glanced up at it with an uncomfortable misgiving. Choosing the rods and flies had put his two friends quite at their ease again; now they were both talking at once, telling their travelling adventures, and laughing over them unrestrainedly. Ronald did not like to check them, but he flushed hotly once more as he fancied the merry, careless voices going up into his mother's room. Would she think that he was laughing with them? He hurried them on past the house and down to the river, and then he discovered his own silence with a start,

finding that they were growing silent in their turn. So, recalling his thoughts by a great effort, he forced himself to talk and laugh, and to become a hospitable and gracious host. By degrees a kind of excitement crept over him—it was but the natural reaction from the strain under which he had been living. A wild merriment took possession of him; he laughed at the smallest jokes, and talked louder and faster than he had ever done in his life. When they began fishing he did not take a rod himself, but went from one friend to the other, giving them the benefit of his experience and advice.

At one o'clock a pony came from the house with a luncheon-basket that made Duncan open his eyes with wonder. This was clearly not a day on which any business was to be done. As the three young fishermen sat on the grass round their basket, the air rang with their merriment. Ronald's eyes were sparkling; he could not help being proud of his beautiful Dalbraith in its autumn garb. "The birch-trees seem as if they were hung over with gold sovereigns, and the other trees look like oranges and lemons and copper tea-kettles," said Frank Giffard, poetically; "and it is all so jolly, you know, with the silver water spouting away, just like a scene at the theatre."

Ronald's high spirits never flagged all day—he would not let them flag. If a qualm came over him now and then, or a stab of memory recalled a certain other luncheon on the hillside more than a year ago, he stifled it with a laugh and a fresh story. Duncan, watching him with grim astonishment, came to the conclusion that his young master was "fey."

But towards evening his exhilaration began to fade. He fancied that Rory looked at him reproach-

fully as he waited on them at dinner, and when they went out into the quiet starlight afterwards it was not so easy to keep thought at bay.

As soon as he decently could he conducted the two Giffards to their rooms. "Well, we've had a tremendously jolly day," said Harry, as he closed his door.

Ronald rushed away to his mother's room and knocked. There was no answer, but bending down to listen he could hear that she was pacing up and down within.

Up and down—up and down without a pause. He tried the lock softly, but it was fastened. He stood listening to the footstep, restless and yet monotonous, for a few minutes; at last in a low voice he called her. She took no notice, probably she did not hear him; but it would have made any one sad to see the boy standing there, leaning against the wall, waiting, and listening wistfully outside the door, in vain.

The colour sank out of his cheeks—his brow knit—he looked years older than he had done awhile ago; while his merry mood ebbed away and shivered out of sight.

At last he gave up in despair and went away to his own room. There he dashed the door to, and blew out his candle, that no light even might look in upon him at the close of his "jolly" day.

The two Giffards were astir betimes next morning. Ronald went with them part of their way, and though it was his last day at home, he did not return until late in the afternoon. When he met Lady Douglas, neither of them made any allusion to his guests of yesterday, but from that time there was a little change in Ronald. It was very light—hardly perceptible—still it was there. Henceforward

he went his own way more, and tried less to please his mother.

The fame that had been so fair during all his time at Eton, got somehow rather dimmed during his last half. He was restless and idle. He got into bad company. Something seemed to have gone wrong with him, said his tutor. There was no great actual harm, but he would be better away from Eton now. So the sun of his school-life went down cloudily at the end.

He braved it out with his mother, and sent her no answer to a severe letter she wrote to him, just at the moment when a few soft pitying words would have touched his heart.

Colonel Douglas was away with his regiment, and, left to his own devices, Ronald went to London, when he quitted Eton. He was fast growing up, and a desperate craving after excitement had seized upon him. He longed by some means, he scarcely cared by what, to escape from the burden of gloom he had laboured under so long. He was very young, ignorant, and unwary. One or two of his companions took him to some races, and taught him to bet. Ronald gave himself up to this new enthralment, and went on for a time in a sort of excitement—then suddenly he awoke to the horrible consciousness that he had been losing heavily.

He was smitten with despair and with loathing of himself, but he did the best thing that remained to him under the circumstances, and went straight to Colonel Douglas with his remorse and his confession. The gentleness that met him where he most expected harshness went far to save the poor boy. His uncle listened quietly, pitied, and forgave him, but he did not tell him of the compassion that secretly filled him, for the desolate position, and the

home coldness which he believed to be the chief causes of the evil. Loyal as he was to his nephew's widow, there were moments when a flame of generous anger rose up against her in the heart of Norman Douglas.

Yet, once again he was forced to feel for her. Just now the money so wantonly lost was especially needed at Dalbraith. At a sufficiently low ebb at all times, the legal expenses of a succession had nearly drained the exchequer. And there was one old tenant—a loyal, faithful old man, one of Lord Douglas's truest friends—who had been patiently waiting for a long time until a new farm-stedding, much needed, could be put up on his farm. It had been promised by Lord Douglas, and was one of the last plans with which he had occupied himself; but his death had delayed its being carried out. Now the sum needed had been gathered together again painfully, almost pound by pound, by Ronald's guardians; and this money had to be taken to pay the young heir's gambling debts.

The blow was very bitter to his mother. She was righteously, naturally, fatally displeased. It fell to her lot to tell the old farmer of this new delay, and to witness the grieved, surprised, puzzled expression on his rugged face.

To go back from a promise, and for such a cause, stung her haughty spirit to the quick; and that Ronald should thus belie an engagement entered into by his father was a thing she found it hard to forgive.

She did not write to him, but when Colonel Douglas refused to show him the letter he had himself received, Ronald guessed at its concents. He was broken down with remorse, and his uncle judged it wisest to spare him many words.

One thing it was possible to do. The moor and the deer-forest of Dalbraith could be let. There

was a sore struggle before the family pride of Norman Douglas yielded to what he felt to be his duty. He belonged to the old school, to which such dealings were both new and distasteful; but in this way only, money, to be spent among the people on the estates, could be obtained. That argument silenced, without reconciling Lady Douglas to the step. It might be that her husband would have wished it, and as she said rather bitterly to her uncle, "It will be no sacrifice to Ronald."

"If it were ever so great a sacrifice, he has been extravagant, and he must pay the penalty," answered Colonel Douglas.

Ronald thought so too. He agreed with a mute gesture, when his uncle told him of his decision and its reasons.

A few minutes after he looked up and said, "Uncle Norman."

"Well, Ronald."

"I think the river ought to be let too," said Ronald, quickly.

"Hey-dey! why, Ronald, I thought it was the one thing you did care for."

"I know. I would rather give up something I do care for."

Colonel Douglas smiled, and made no immediate answer. It went against the grain with him to sever one of the only links that bound Ronald to Dalbraith; but after all there might be things for him to learn in life more valuable even than the love of home. "And trust a Highlander for that," thought Norman.

The river at Dalbraith was let that year, and "dour and glum as a nor'-easter" did the sportsmen who rented it, find Duncan the fisherman.

CHAPTER IX

LORD RONALD, MY SON

"But wae, wae was the heavy mane
Gaed thro' that Castle ha', O;
When gloamin' cam' ae summer e'en,
Young Ronald was awa', O."

A FEW weeks afterwards an old Eton friend, who was going abroad for a long journey, asked Ronald to go with him. The two fellows were to take a travelling tutor with them, who would to a certain extent look after them. They were to go to Canada to begin with, and after that their plans of travel were uncertain. Colonel Douglas thought the scheme a good one, Lady Douglas gave her consent, and the preparations were quickly made.

Ronald was staying in London at the empty house of his friend Hugh Raymond's father. The very day had come on the evening of which they were to start for Liverpool, when a letter was put into his hands. It was from Grizel—an incoherent, illegible, tearful epistle—that, being wrongly directed, could not even arrive by the morning post like other people's letters, but must needs come straggling in, late in the afternoon, when it was all but too late to be of use to any one.

Tearing it impatiently open, Ronald found in it a piteous appeal to him not to leave England on any account without saying good-bye to his mother. Oddly mixed up together, were messages that Lady Douglas would have sent if she had been told of

this letter, assurances from Grizel of his mother's love to him, and a harrowing description of what his own remorse would be if he went abroad without one farewell word or kiss.

Authorised or unauthorised, Ronald received the missive only too willingly as a summons from his mother. His heart, which he never could really harden towards her, had been failing him more every day as his departure drew near, but till now he had been given no excuse for going to her.

There was not a moment to be lost if he meant to catch the Scotch express that night. Rushing down to the hall, he seized hap-hazard on a portmanteau that was waiting with the remainder of the luggage to be taken to the station. Then hailing a hansom, he was in the act of leaving a hurried, confused message with the servant, when Hugh Raymond himself came unexpectedly along the pavement.

"Douglas! Good heavens! what are you about? Where are you going off to?"

"Home—to Scotland. I have been sent for," answered Ronald, briefly. "I was just leaving a message for you. I can't stay now, or I shall lose my train."

"But I say—stop a moment—what are you thinking of? We can't wait for you."

"You must do as you please about that. I shall be back in less than a week. Great Northern. Quick!" he shouted to the cabman, and away went the hansom rattling down Brook Street, leaving Hugh Raymond and the tutor, who had just come out of the house, staring blankly at each other on the doorstep.

Late on the afternoon of his third day's travelling, Ronald reached Dalbraith. He had not lost any

time, and had scarcely stopped to eat, much less to sleep, on the road.

The stable-yard was empty when he dismounted there from the dog-cart which had brought him the last stage of his journey, and as he met no one on his way to the house, he entered without ringing the bell, and ran upstairs at once to his mother's room.

Lady Douglas sat at her table writing. There was a softer, gentler expression than usual on her face. The letter that lay half-finished before her was a farewell to her son, and was touched with greater kindness—a more motherly and melancholy tenderness—than any she had written to him for months. She had not been told rightly of the day he was to leave England, and thought that her letter would be in plenty of time to reach him.

"Perhaps it is better that you should not come home before you go," she wrote; "but I wish you to know that you carry with you your mother's——"

The opening of the door startled her. She raised her eyes quickly, and a young man stood on the threshold, looking in on her. Her husband's influence had been all day very strongly over her. She had almost fancied that he was near her, approving of the kind words she wrote, and now—

Very tall, with the same dark eyes and hair, seen indistinctly in the half light, standing in the heavy shadow of the doorway, and with the gloom of the passage behind him, it seemed to her for one short mad moment as if the Ronald of her youth—her husband—stood before her.

She started up with a wild cry of "Ronald!" He came hastily forward, and she knew him.

Some women would have been softened by the wonderful momentary likeness, but this woman it

seemed to turn to stone. The keen agony of disappointment coming upon that brief second of unreasoning hope, the horror she had of being betrayed into showing strong emotion, even a strange pang of indignation at his glad, eager look as he approached her—all combined to make her heart stand still, and the blood freeze in her veins.

She disengaged herself from his arms, and putting one hand for support on the table behind her, she said, in a trembling voice:

"What are you doing here? Where are your friends?"

"Gone abroad, I believe. I came to you, mother."

"Do you want me to pay more gambling debts?"

To her own ears it scarcely seemed as if she herself was speaking. The words appeared to be uttered in her hearing, and some power outside herself forced her to repeat them aloud.

Ronald drew back.

"Did you send for me to ask me that, mother?"

"I did not send for you."

He turned away without another word, and left the room.

Lady Douglas fell back heavily into her chair and sat motionless. Presently she took up the letter from the table before her and tore it in two, and the action seemed to bring back the life that had been almost suspended.

Bitter tears poured down her face. The pride and strength was all beaten out of her. She was torn from head to foot with sobs.

Then after the storm there came a great calm down upon her. The two faces—the father's and the son's—were distinctly now under her eyes; both, as if in very presence, were before her. The bewildered pain and surprise on the young face

scarcely seemed to upbraid her more than did the frank, trusting eyes that she felt looking into hers with no reproach in them—only a question why she had thus sent away their son.

"Ronald, forgive me," she said half aloud, and she covered her face with her hands.

A long time passed before she recollected herself, with a sudden start. Why had she left him alone so long under the impression of her cruel words?

She went hastily upstairs, and knocked at Ronald's door. There was no answer, and as she glanced in she saw that the room looked just as usual, with closed blinds, and no sign of preparation or habitation.

Evidently no one knew yet of his arrival. He must have come up straight to her.

He must be in the library below, she thought, or in the gallery or the hall. But each one of these was empty and undisturbed.

He had gone out to the stable, or perhaps he did not know that Norman was away, and was seeking him at the tower.

Lady Douglas rang the bell hastily, then she went back into the hall. A plaid that she knew to be Ronald's lay half on the table, half on the floor, just as he had thrown it down in his hurry. She gathered it up, and carried it with her to the turret-door of the entrance, which she opened.

On the step outside stood Grizel, her bonnet awry, her eyes inflamed with tears, and beside her was Marion Stuart.

"Grizel, where is Douglas?" asked his mother hurriedly. "You have seem him."

"Oh, Margaret, I did not think he would come so soon," said Grizel, breaking forth into a fresh fit of crying, "and he is gone."

"Gone—where?"

"I meant to tell you I had written before he came. Now he is gone."

"Who is gone?"

"Ronald—your boy. Oh, my poor Margaret, I ought to have told you sooner, and now he is gone."

"Gone!" repeated Lady Douglas, and she began to tremble. "He cannot have gone far. He was with me only a few minutes ago."

"My poor Margaret, he has been away for more than half an hour."

Margaret rang the bell vehemently again and again. They heard it go echoing in long peals through the house.

"Follow my son," she cried; "find him; bring him back. He cannot have gone far. I must see him."

Marion Stuart had stood looking silently into Lady Douglas's face. She started forward now. "Cousin Margaret, I will go." And she turned and flew along the road. She was fleet of foot, light of limb, and strong. They saw her cross the burn and scramble in a moment up the steep short cut, disdaining the easier windings of the road. She reached the top of the hill, turned aside into the shadow of the wood, and disappeared.

"It is no good at all. She cannot come up with him," said Grizel, sitting down on the stone step in despair. "How should she? and it is all my fault."

Others—messengers of a forlorn hope—had followed Marion. They went at Margaret's desire, but they knew it was of no avail.

"He came upon me like his own wraith," explained Grizel, "as I was standing, misdoubting

nothing, in the hall. I heard a footstep run down the corkscrew stair. I thought it would be Marion, and I cried on her that I was here; but instead, Ronald came out upon me, white like the wall, a braw, tall laddie, and oh, Margaret! just the moral of his father."

She paused and dried her eyes, then went on again.

"He was for passing on without heeding me, for there was a queer, scared look in his eyes, and I cannot tell if he even saw me. But I just ran and caught him by his two hands, for I couldn't rightly speak, and he stooped down—a fine, bonny man with his tall head—and kissed me. 'God bless you, Grizzy,' he said; 'you meant all for the best.' And straight out of the hall, without another word.

"I ran after him round to the stable-yard, and there was the machine that brought him over from Invershane, and the horse still in the shafts, and the driver giving the poor beastie its bit and sup of water.

"'Aye,' Ronald was saying when I came up; 'feed him well, Sandy, for he'll need to go back faster than he came, for I'll have to catch the coach at Dalmally to-night.'"

"And you let him go?" said Margaret.

"Margaret, woman—what was I to do? The coachman lad grumbled out that his horse couldn't do the job, but Ronald just got up quietly and said he'd have to try; and he took the reins into his hands, and never heeded me till he was just driving away. Then he said, 'I couldn't stay, Grizzy,' and lifted his cap from his head to little Marion, as if she had been a stranger—and away. And now that will be better than three quarters of an hour ago."

"Yes," said Lady Douglas, in a quiet voice. "They cannot stop him;" and she went into the house.

Marion was brought back that evening by a sympathizing sheep-farmer, who, jogging home from a distant market, found her very weary, on the road, and mounted her on his own pony, after assuring her that he had met the Glasgow coach a mile and a bit on the other side of Invershane, and with his "ain twa een" had seen the young Lord on its roof.

There was no more to be done.

His mother wrote to him while her heart was still burning, her nerves thrilling, her repentance fresh and keen upon her, such a letter as should have brought him back to her feet and to her arms at once. It was such a letter as a mother and a proud woman could only write once in a life-time—such a letter, that, to think of it as she lay in her bed at night, made her flush and tremble with mixed humiliation and thankfulness.

She sent it to Sir Piers Raymond's house in London, believing that as the ship he was to have gone in would have sailed, he would be sure to go there for tidings of his friend. Besides, they would know his whereabouts, and she had drawn a strong score under the "*To be forwarded*" on the cover. He would be sure to get it.

She waited long for his coming, starting whenever a ring, or the sound of wheels, or a quick step was heard.

He did not come.

Then she watched for an answer—in vain.

Months afterwards the letter was returned to her, enclosed in a note from Sir Piers Raymond, regretting that the housemaid left in charge of his London house had failed to forward to him the enclosed letter for Lord Douglas at the time, but that, judging by its post-mark and its ancient date, he thought it

wiser to return it at this late period to Lady Douglas. That was the end.

She drew the old letter half out of its cover and read a few lines, wondering how it was possible that she could ever have penned such words. The warm glow of feeling had long since sunk into ashes, failing a response. She read but half a page, and then tossed it just as it was into the fire.

It was unreasonable to feel hurt and wounded with Ronald for the fate of a letter that had never reached him. She knew that it was unreasonable; and yet what a chill those months of silence had sent into her heart.

Ronald had never been near London again. When he left it he knew that his friends purposed spending a day or two at Sir Piers Raymond's country house, on their way to Liverpool. It was barely possible that by rapid travelling he might catch the ship before she sailed. He liked the race across Scotland and half England against time. It gave him something to think about, and kept off other thoughts. He was lucky, and caught one or two trains unexpectedly.

When he got to Liverpool, the American steamer was all but moving. The people for the shore had left her, and her great engines were throbbing. But he got on board, how, did not matter very much. Hugh Raymond was shaking him by the hand, welcoming and reproaching him in a breath, as they steamed down the Mersey.

A few days afterwards, Colonel Douglas received a hurried line or two by the pilot:

"Dear Uncle Norman,

"We are off at last, and I write to thank you for all your kindness to me. They say we are likely to

have a fair run across. Will you say good-bye to Granny for me, and remember me to Kenneth when you see him ?

" Your affectionate nephew,

" Ronald.

" I went to Dalbraith before we sailed, and saw my mother, and said good-bye to Grizel."

Colonel Douglas sent the note to Margaret, and that was all they heard of Ronald for a season.

He was away five years.

For two years of that time his mother and his uncle were well content that he should be abroad. The last three were years of growing anxiety and disquiet to both in their several ways.

As long as Ronald and Hugh Raymond kept together, Colonel Douglas was more at ease, even though their so-called tutor demanded his recall after eighteen months of incessant journeying, being exhausted and alarmed at their wild schemes of further travel. He gave a good report of both on his return, but said they were bent on finding their way into all the most outlandish corners of the earth. Douglas was the leading spirit, but his friend followed willingly enough.

Sir Piers and General Douglas (as he had lately become) conferred together, and agreed that it was perhaps wiser to let the boys have their fling for a little while longer. Hugh, at all events, said his father, must be home for his coming of age next year. So, till then, General Douglas made up his mind to wait. He was a great deal at Dalbraith now, for his promotion had taken from him the command of his beloved regiment, and he had retired from active service. And though Douglas would soon be of age, and his guardianship nominally ended, the management of the estates fell entirely into his hands

while their young master was roaming over the world. Lady Douglas, though she still interested herself keenly in everything that concerned the property, left the business part of it to him.

She said very little about her son's prolonged absence. It may be that she grieved over it in secret —they could not tell. His unfortunate visit just before he started had only widened the breach between them, by throwing a constraint over their letters to each other. How could she write easily, when for many months she did not know whether or no he had wilfully left that one letter of hers unanswered?

The general was more visibly troubled about his nephew. He was extremely fond of the lad. "It was easy to see the young Lord had gotten on his honour's blind side," said Adam Haldane, discontentedly. Something in Ronald's circumstances, but more in Ronald's self, had by degrees knit his uncle's heart to him in warm affection. He had been compelled to be his champion—he was deeply sorry for him, and sometimes indignant on his behalf; and then he had a peculiar feeling of loyalty to Ronald as the young head of his house. To be the chief of the Douglas's of Dalbraith was still something in the eyes at least of Norman Douglas.

And in the last few years the boy's generous, true, faulty character, had fairly won his love. He fretted after him, and could not get him out of his head; and when, after some months of rather impatient waiting, Hugh Raymond returned alone to fulfil the promise to his father, the poor General was bitterly disappointed.

He had looked upon Ronald's accompanying his friend as so completely a matter of course, that he had not even thought of giving an order to that

effect in any of his letters. Norman Douglas would indeed have been surprised if a command of his had been disregarded, but on this occasion he had given none. Ronald merely wrote that it was a pity Raymond had to go home, but as there was no hurry about his return, he might as well stay out as he was there, and see what there still remained to be seen.

General Douglas went up to London on purpose to see young Raymond, but it was wonderfully little which he could extract from the returned traveller. "They had parted at San Francisco. Douglas was very well; never had been better in his life, he should say. They had done California together, and he believed Douglas was going to Mexico, and that he wanted to see Texas. That would just suit the queer old fellow."

"Queer, eh? What sort of a fellow now?" asked the uncle anxiously.

"Well, you see," meditatively, "he is none too like other people."

"Rather hot-headed and restless, I dare say," observed the General with a smile.

"Restless! I believe you. He couldn't stand a day in any decent quiet place where one could get a respectable dinner and have a little peace. There never was such a reckless dare-devil fellow for getting you into every manner of scrape. But then," continued Hugh, relenting, "when he had got you up a tree, he was awfully good and plucky and cheery till he got you off clear again. Goodness knows at other times he is glum and silent enough."

General Douglas scratched his eyebrow with his tortoise-shell eye-glasses, and sighed. The description was not entirely reassuring.

"Well," he said, "perhaps he is just as well out of England just now" (it was at the beginning of the

Crimean war); "he would be volunteering out to the East to join my boy Kenneth there, or something."

"Oh, he couldn't do that, could he?" observed Hugh.

"What do you mean?" asked the General quickly.

"Oh, I don't know. I thought he had made a vow never to shoot a man, or see a gun fired, or some humbug of that kind. They used to have a story about it at Eton."

"Rubbish," said General Douglas.

"Ah, I dare say. I don't know myself. Of course I never spoke to him about anything of the sort."

"It's wonderful to me how little you young fellows seem to know of each other after all this time," remarked General Douglas, with an impatient frown. To which Hugh Raymond responded only by a laugh.

Ronald's letters were even less enlightening than was his friend. They contained absolutely no clue to his character, and might have been published as one of those books of travels, in which a few stars are always to be found whenever something personal or a little interesting seems about to be told; only Ronald's letters would have needed no stars. Studying them with painful interest, as did the one or two people to whom they were addressed, they could see the school-boy scrawl gradually settle into a firm close, manly handwriting; the sentences grew shorter, the descriptions less diffuse, and more careless. Occasionally an impression was powerfully rendered, or a thought expressed in terse, nervous language; but they were merely thoughts and impressions about outward things. He spoke of time with the careless prodigality of youth: "I

might, perhaps, get there next year," he sometimes said of some place which he wished to see. And he was moving so constantly that letters were most uncertain in reaching him.

Then occurred long silences with their nameless fears. There was a blank of several months during which Ronald, last heard of at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, sent no tidings of himself, and which traced one or two new lines on his uncle's brow.

But when next they heard, he was far on his way home through Japan, China, and India. In the late summer he wrote from Alexandria. He was coming.

But was there some strange fate that dogged his footsteps? Could it be that the old superstition they had all laughed at, yet held good?

He was on board the steamer coming from Alexandria to Marseilles, and at dinner the first day he sat opposite to a lively, black-bearded young Frenchman, who eyed him with a good deal of attention.

Afterwards he came up to the tall Englishman as he was pacing the deck in the sunset, and taking off his hat, said courteously, "I believe we ought to know each other, Lord Douglas; my name is Gaston de Beaurepaire."

Yes; it must have been fate—for Gaston de Beaurepaire, the eldest son of Lord Douglas's old friend, was an inveterate gambler.

Less than a month afterwards Norman Douglas received a short quiet note from his nephew, praying him as a proof of kindness—(perhaps the last proof, wrote Ronald, that his uncle would ever care to give him)—to come and meet him immediately in London.

Full of forebodings, the General hurried up to town. Alas! it was the old story. Ronald had

been playing again, and losing. A few mad miserable days had undone at a stroke the work of years. Poor Dalbraith!—almost freed from its burdens by Norman's patient toil and the mother's ceaseless self-denial through the time of the young man's minority! It did almost break his heart to mortgage it again—and for this. For the old place, with its wide, poor acres, and its scanty rent-roll, was more precious than a kingdom in the eyes of Norman Douglas.

"Margaret," said General Douglas, "for all that's come and gone, your son is a grand creature."

Lady Douglas sat looking up at the General as he stood before the fire. There was a light of hopefulness in his eyes, and a glad ring in his voice.

"This has been a terrible business, my poor child; but it is over; we must forget it. I have good hopes now; upon my word I have."

Lady Douglas smiled a little. She would fain be glad and hopeful too, but it was not easy.

"I wish I had it in me to forget," she said.

He bent down and took her hand. "I shall wait until you see him. But you will mind our bargain, Margaret. For my sake no reproaches—not a disapproving look even, when your prodigal son comes home."

"He is not a boy now," she said, with another of her faint smiles.

"You will not scold him? Good! But I want more than that. Why, Margaret, you might leave it to me. I am sure I was severe enough; aye, and sore enough! and I tell you now that I am satisfied. Should I have bound him else to come straight home to you? I swear to you," he added, firing up suddenly, "that you may trust your son!"

She looked up, somewhat moved by his energy. He met her eyes with his keen grey ones. "Be

yourself, Margaret," he said, gravely. "Be loving —and be wise!"

A tinge of colour came into her pale face. If she had once sent him away, had she not paid the penalty in the course of these five years? She glanced up nervously at the clock. The hands were on the stroke of eight.

"He will soon be here," said General Douglas. She pressed her hands against her heart as if it was beating heavily. The hall where they were sitting was lighted up.

"Where are they all?" she asked. "Granny, and Marion, and Grizel? They were all to be here to welcome him."

Almost as she spoke Lady Beatrix entered, and came quietly to sit down by Margaret, holding her cold hand.

There followed a tall, very fair girl, with clear, honest blue eyes, and a noble, brave, serious face, on which just now the flickering red colour of expectation was coming and going every minute. Then Grizel trotted in, in the highest state of glee and figdet, with her best cap on her head, and a clean pocket-handkerchief ready for immediate action folded in her hand. "For we shall all shed tears without a doubt," she said to Marion.

"Oh, Cousin Grizel, I hope not!" replied the girl, in a tone of horror.

Grizel hurried up to Lady Douglas. "And are you feeling sadly nervous, my dear?" she asked.

Margaret hastily straightened herself, and sat very upright, grasping both the arms of her chair.

"Certainly not," she answered, waving aside the fan with which Grizel had armed herself.

The latter held up her hand. "I hear a carriage!" she exclaimed suddenly.

Everybody started. Margaret half rose; the General walked quickly to the hall-door; Marion drew back into the shadow. "It was nothing," said General Douglas, coming back, and casting a look of reproof on Grizel. "It was just Grizel's imagination."

"I am sure I heard it. Hark! there again! Listen!"

"There isn't even a sough of wind to-night," added the General, scarcely vouchsafing to notice her. "It is a remarkably still evening."

Of course it was a false alarm. Grizel continued to experience one every three minutes. Though she said nothing more, she was constantly starting to her feet, and kept them all in such commotion, guarding against the shocks they could not help receiving from her wild looks, that when at last, without sound of wheels or bell, the outer door was opened, and a tall man walked in, no one noticed him till he was nearly in their midst.

"Ronald," then said the General, quickly and quietly, "where did you spring from, my dear boy?" But nobody heeded the question, for there was a moment's pause, and then Ronald was kneeling at his mother's feet.

"My word!" said Grizel beneath her breath; "my word, but what a kingly-looking creature!"

* * * * *

"Uncle Norman," said Marion earnestly, later in the evening, as they two were left together for a moment after the others had dispersed; "you do think, don't you, that he and Cousin Margaret will be happy together now?"

"It is in the hands of God, Marion," he replied. But something in the evening had damped his sanguine hopes.

It was certainly not any coldness on the part of either Ronald or his mother. Both appeared to be unable to keep their eyes off one another.

She sat gazing at him, her hands clasped together on her knee, and her great eyes seeming to burn in her pale face. And certainly no mother could have looked at him without pride. "Kingly-looking," as Grizel said, and of lofty stature, there was something in his dark splendour of beauty, that brought to the old cousin's mind the description of the "choice young man and goodly" whom the prophet Samuel had anointed king in Gilboa.

But not with the one great shock of meeting could be overthrown the barriers of years. Lady Douglas shrank with a strange shyness from being alone with him, and when the others tried to manage that they should be left together, she kept Lady Beatrix carefully by her side, while Ronald seemed trying to understand and to meet her wishes with an acquiescence that was half proud and half humble.

In a few days they appeared to have drifted back into much their old manner of life. The young man was very grave, very silent, and had a look of hopelessness and discouragement about him that it distressed General Douglas terribly to see, and which, ever since they met in London, it had been his great wish to free him from. He watched Ronald, and hovered about him, like an old hen, Lady Beatrix told him, that could not get its one chick to be contented under the once familiar coop.

The General was always going up to Dalbraith, to see what the lad was after, or else coming across the loch to talk him over with Lady Beatrix.

Marion was reading in the window one day when one of these discussions was going on. She could not help listening, and her book dropped on to the window-sill before her as the two elders talked. General Douglas laughed for a moment when Granny gently made fun of him, but he was greatly in earnest.

"Now little Marion there," he said suddenly, "she sees and understands it all."

"I!" exclaimed Marion, turning round with such a start and such a rush of colour to her cheeks as could not but attract the attention of both uncle and grandmother.

"She was dreaming over her book. You frightened her, Norman," said granny quickly.

"I beg her pardon," and General Douglas held his hand to her with a smile. "I know she is gentle and womanly enough to wish she could help all who stand in need of it." Marion came slowly and took his hand, but kept her head turned away.

"Ah, dear lady," he went on, speaking to Lady Beatrix, but still clasping Marion's hand with a kindly pressure, "you are the very last person to smile at a spoilt life—such fair promise wasted, such a power of affection and happiness and usefulness thrown away. Things seem always to have gone against him,—and for what? For an accident, a visitation of God, a misfortune that might just as well have fallen on one of us!" He felt Marion's hand tremble in his.

"I know the poor fellow has gone wrong of late. I don't defend him, dear lady, as you know,—but he has bitterly repented. I go further back than these last unfortunate weeks; I look back, and I remember that lad with his sunny face; I remember what hopes his dear father had of him. I can see

Ronald, on that very last day, laughing and larking with my own boy. I believe it has saddened Kenneth's life too, and no wonder. The one poor fellow was not more innocent in it all, not more blameless than the other." Marion tried to draw away her hand. "And so, Marion," he continued, turning to her, "you do not wonder that sometimes the old uncle's heart aches sorely for his boy."

Marion struggled to answer, and at the same time to hide the tears that had brimmed over her eyelashes, and one of which fell with a great splash on to the hand that was still held in General Douglas's.

He glanced up at her quickly, then turned his eyes away and became very thoughtful. Marion left the room, and the two who remained sat without speaking for a long time.

"Granny," said General Douglas at last, with a sort of shyness in his voice.

"Don't say anything, Norman," she answered quickly, and then they were silent again.

But from that day a thought, a wish, a hope dawned upon his mind. He tried to put it away at first with a "Pooh, nonsense!" but it was tenacious, and not easy to get rid of.

He could not help watching Douglas and Marion when they were together. Ronald's manner to women was one after his own heart, gentle, reverential, slightly formal; and of late he had acquired a melancholy dignity of bearing, that to his uncle's mind could scarcely fail to be attractive to any one with whom he was constantly thrown.

He looked at the young man through Marion's eyes, as it were, with wistful eagerness—sometimes wishing he were more cheerful, sometimes wondering

what he talked to her about, or getting restless over his long days of solitary absence.

As for Marion, the General well-nigh fell in love with her himself; he thought her sweet, maidenly ways so lovable and perfect. She was almost cold in manner to her cousin, but no one could think she was indifferent. Quiet she always was, but her colour came and went; she could not seem unconscious of his presence, or keep herself from listening when he spoke, whoever she might be talking to at the moment. The rare sound of his laugh lighted up her face. It was her evident constraint that gave most hope to the vicarious lover who was watching her thus earnestly;—her shy, modest little attempts to dispel the shadow on Lord Douglas's face, if, as sometimes happened, he was silent and moody in her presence.

Uncle Norman was ashamed of himself for his eagerness, and for the impatience he felt when things appeared to be at a standstill. Twenty times a day he called himself a ridiculous old match maker, but none the less his heart beat when he saw the two young people speaking to each other.

So much, so very much, seemed to him to be at stake—the welfare of his boy's whole future. It might prove the turning-point for him; the lifting of the cloud. He had been tempted to despair, and then one day he thought he read the solution of the difficulty in Marion's face. A happy home; a loving wife; the wholesome breaking in of sweet common influences, happy voices, laughter, light words and daily duties, on the long-sustained tragedy of his life. It was terrible to General Douglas to think that all this certain good might be left undone for a girl's whim, a young man's halting fancy.

By-and-by he perceived that others were beginning to look on as well as himself. He caught a shrewd smile, and something that almost amounted to a wink, on Grizel's kindly face, and he rejoiced to see it, though he frowned on her sternly in return.

"Gin our young Lord thocht o' gettin' wedded I should na be that set against it," said Fergus significantly. The General cut him short so haughtily that his heart smote him afterwards, and he had to go back for a crack and a good-natured joke with the old man.

Thus weeks passed on. There was only a slight chill now and then, a faint misgiving about Douglas himself. Could it be possible that he was yet blind to the chance of happiness that might be within his reach?

One morning General Douglas had been doing some business with his nephew, in his own study at Norman's Tower. It was a lovely day, and the sunshine was streaming in at the open window, playing with the white hair of the old soldier and lighting up his noble-looking countenance. Douglas, a misty sunbeam dancing on his head, sat with his chin supported by his hand, dutifully attentive, but not greatly interested in the business before him. He looked, as his uncle could not bear to see any young man look, half wearied, half indifferent.

Once or twice the General glanced at him over his spectacles, and rather sarcastically regretted that he was under the necessity of boring him, but he had no idea of letting him off before the work was done.

"Ronald," he said at last, and he threw down his pen, leant back in his arm-chair and crossed his legs. "You ought to marry, my dear boy."

"I, Uncle Norman?" answered Ronald, looking up with a stretch and a smile. "I don't believe

there is any nice, good woman who would have me."

"Stuff and rubbish. I hate to hear you talk that unreal, morbid kind of nonsense. I tell you there are plenty of nice women who would take you and be thankful."

"I don't know any," said Ronald, rather absently.

The General did not quite like to say, "Then I do," though that was pretty nearly what he had in his mind. He hesitated, looked at Ronald, and blushed as if he had been a young lady himself. "So the fellow really hasn't seen it," he thought with some concern.

"You are modest, my boy," he said aloud, patting the young man's shoulder.

Ronald shook his head, but made no answer. He was not very much occupied with the subject, which gave him an advantage over the General, who was.

"You would be the better of a wife, Ronald," he said again.

"Can you find me one, Uncle Norman?" asked Douglas, smiling; but he was far from thinking there was any earnest in this idle talk. The question was so *à propos* that it took the General completely aback. He hummed and ha'd, blushed again, put his glasses on his nose, and throwing back his head pretended to read a letter. This was a manœuvre to gain time, but to his dismay Ronald did not seem anxious to pursue the subject. He also took up one of the papers on the table.

"The blindness of some people astonishes me," burst out the baffled diplomatist, after a few minutes, during which Ronald had been reading on unsuspiciously; "it looks as if they must shut their eyes on purpose."

"What is it, Uncle Norman?" and Ronald dutifully laid aside his paper, and looked puzzled and attentive.

"They can't see, or they won't see, what is for their own good; they let all the best chances in the world slip by. Either they won't use their eyes or they have not heart enough to care. It passes my patience to put up with the young people of the present day."

"Are you talking of me? What is it I have done?" asked Douglas; but his uncle went on unheeding—"Yes; it entirely passes my patience. I give you my word it fairly makes my blood boil to see such cool, calculating ways. Why, in my day if a fine young creature,—as sweet, kind, modest a little soul as ever lived——fie, Ronald; can't you understand?"

Perhaps Ronald did begin to understand a little, for he coloured as frankly as the General had done.

"Do pray speak out, Uncle Norman. What is it that you mean?"

"I mean that I think you have a chance now, Ronald, and that you are a fool if you do not take it."

A pause.

"Do you really think that?"

"I do indeed; bless my soul, my dear boy," he said, calming down when he saw the emotion he had aroused in the young man, "I haven't lived all these years in the world for nothing."

"Will you mind telling me what has put it into your head?"

"Not I—tell you indeed!—that's your business to find out, not mine to tell."

"You must let me think this over," said Ronald, after another long interval. "It is a new thought to me."

"Judge for yourself, my dear fellow," answered the General.

Douglas leant over the table shading his eyes with his hand. "Is it possible?" he said softly. Then in a few minutes he looked up. "May I ask you one or two questions—my mother?"

"She will rejoice. I am convinced that she has thought of it, and that she wishes it."

"And granny?"

General Douglas took off his glasses, rubbed them, fitted them on again, and said rather huskily: "I believe you would have her granny's blessing."

"Thank you, Uncle Norman," said Douglas, holding out his hand. The General grasped it with a half-uttered petition that God would guide the young man aright; and then no more words were spoken on the subject.

There are surprises that cease to be surprises at all after the first moment of enlightenment.

Like memories lodged, but not lost, in some deep recess of the brain, and startled into life with curious distinctness by an unexpected touch, so it may be with impressions that have been unconsciously received. Ronald had been blind, and yet—

When he was gone General Douglas returned to his arm-chair, closed his eyes, drew a deep breath of relief, and smiled. It had been an anxious moment—a great risk—a serious step to take on the impulse of the hour. What if Ronald had not responded just in the way he had responded? It was a thing only to be justified by success—but then, it had succeeded,—and so the General smiled.

Meanwhile Ronald was mounting the hill-side with long and rapid strides. The sun struck hotly on the moor, but there was a great rock yonder that would make a covert from the heat. A brace

of young grouse went whirring up; a mountain hare rushed across his path; how beautiful everything was looking! At last he threw himself down on the heather and tried to think coherently.

It was impossible to say how much the idea of being loved affected him. He had lived very little with women, and had in a manner lost his mother just as he was growing up to manhood. His ideas of family affection and of home-life had become invested with a halo of vague regretful tenderness and reverence. He had thought himself cut off from them, and had grown to believe that a good woman would shrink from linking her fate with his.

That Marion, brave, true, sweet Marion, who had known him ever since they were both children —to whom the tragedy of his life and its shadows were no secrets—that she, out of her pure, womanly sympathy, had grown to care for him, seemed to him like the opening of a new and better life. He was very weary of the one he had been leading; it was all hollow and lonely, and worse than unsatisfying. The vision of a bright calm home, with a wife who loved him, came to him with a curious swell of hope. His feeling for Marion was not so much a young man's impetuous first love as the deep tenderness of a world-wearied and disappointed man, who turns back to the pure dreams of his youth and finds wondering they are still within his reach. That day, alone on the hill-side, he took Marion to his heart, vowing to her the deepest gratitude and the most faithful love.

General Douglas gave him leave a day or two afterwards to go and talk to "Granny," whom he had been preparing for the announcement. Ronald found her a little agitated and tremulous, for Norman, with all his preparation, had taken her by surprise,

and had been as impetuous and eager in advocating his nephew's cause as if he had been a young lover pleading for himself.

She looked up with a kind of wistfulness at Ronald as he came in; he seemed so tall in her little low-roofed drawing-room; and a feeling of anxiety so oppressed her that she did not speak directly.

"Uncle Norman told me I might come," he said, hesitating as he missed the customary bright welcome.

"Yes, Ronald; yes, come in; I was expecting to see you."

"Granny, you know what I want to say?" he began at once, as he took the little trembling hand that she stretched out to him.

"Yes; Norman has told me."

"And will you say yes, Granny?"

She clasped her hands tightly together, and sighed. When she spoke it was with a visible effort.

"Ronald, I should like to say yes. But I have a duty to my Marion. I have to ask myself—ought I to trust you with Charley's child?"

He started slightly. "I would try to be more worthy," he said, in a low voice.

"Norman so trusts you," she resumed, smiling, with her eyes full of tears, "that he is angry with my fears; but I *am* frightened, Ronald;" and she looked up into his face.

"Granny, I will so try to be better."

There was something about her that always made great big men as gentle and simple with her as little children; Douglas knelt down beside her chair and held her hand.

"Granny, I have been so unhappy," he said, bending down his head.

"My boy—" she put up her other hand and smoothed his hair caressingly—"I know; it has

all been hard and sad; I should be glad if I could give you my little Marion to comfort you."

"I would take care of her," he whispered, with a tremble in his voice.

"Yes; I think so. You are true and faithful; but, Ronald, forgive Granny—I do so wish you had never met with poor René's unhappy son."

He held her hand tighter. "It frightens me for you, Ronald," she added, softly.

"Yes; I know."

"You yielded once, it might come to you in the same way again"—he sighed—"how can we be sure? I hurt you, my poor boy; you are good to be so patient, Ronald."

"May I tell you about it?" he asked, after a long pause.

"Yes, surely."

And then, still kneeling by her chair, in simple, humble, broken words, Ronald for the first time in his life made his confession in the ears of a kindly, gentle woman.

At first she listened with her hand held in his strong grasp; then she released it to put it on his shoulder; before he quite finished her arms were round his neck. Oh, Ronald! the cry was in her heart—Oh, Ronald, why has your mother never known you?

"Granny?" he said, looking up when they had both been quiet for some time.

Where were her fears—gone, or forgotten? "If Charley says yes, take Marion," she whispered, "and my blessing with her."

The next thing taken in hand by General Douglas was the finding of an opportunity for Ronald to tell his tale to Marion. But somehow this was not so easy.

Perhaps Ronald preferred to choose his own time. Granny refused her help, telling the eager General that such things fall out much better when they are left to themselves. She even proposed to wait until Marion's father returned from a journey he was making in Switzerland; but to that uncle and nephew both demurred.

Marion, however, grew provokingly shy and afraid of being left alone with her cousin, and Grizel was a marplot of the first order.

She had forgotten her suspicions, and, besides, was quite full of some interests of her own. In the spring she had been away visiting some relations, and since then, whenever the whole party met together, Grizel was sure to be talking of the MacMichaels of Dullsmuir.

Now the MacMichaels of Dullsmuir had long been subjects of dread to everybody at Dalbraith. They were excellent people no doubt, but they came into Grizel's talk on every occasion. They were very numerous, they appeared to be indefatigable letter-writers, and the interests of one and all of them were terribly dear to Grizel.

Whether it was a letter from the Laird himself, with a ponderous account of his crops, and his Ayrshires; or from "our dear Jane," about her trials, and her bairns, and her poultry-yard; or from one of the "Dullsmuir girlies," Grizel never could keep it to herself. She was pre-occupied and communicative, and after smiling, and frowning, and shaking her head over the letter in the morning, she went about frowning, and smiling, and shaking her head all day.

There were sons innumerable at Dullsmuir, all growing up, all "by ordinair" lads, and all unlucky. It seemed impossible to start them in life. They

were perpetually making new ventures out into the world, and invariably falling back, defeated by fortune, on Dullsmuir.

It was very remarkable how active a share all Grizel's friends were perforce compelled to take in the career of these young gentlemen. She was so vitally interested in them herself; she so confidently claimed sympathy in their few successes, and their many failures, that the Douglases found themselves full of triumph when Alick once contrived to pass an examination, and greatly humbled and cast down when Patie failed to get into a writer's office in Edinburgh, and Gibbie to win a fellowship at Glasgow University.

As for "poor Bob," nothing ever went well with him—that was not to be expected. Even Grizel gave him up with a long face.

But by dint of her certainty of sympathy she did set all her family to work, even while they groaned, for the "dear MacMichaels." Lady Douglas herself was roused into writing long letters to her brother on Cosmo's behalf. Ronald was already deep in correspondence with a merchant he knew at Shanghai regarding Davie. Lady Beatrix thought she saw her way, through her son, to an opening in India for "poor Bob." Even the minister of Dalbraith, Doctor Maclean, had his own thought whether it did not behove him to have Patie at the Manse for a season, with a view to preparing him for the ministry. Amid all these brilliant prospects "Dullsmuir" and dear Jane were more active with their pens than ever. Letters rained down upon Grizel.

The MacMichaels threatened seriously to impede the settlement of affairs between Douglas and Marion. Several times had the General, as he thought, left them a free field, but on his return

Grizel and Dullsmuir were masters of the situation. Marion seemed to cling to her old cousin, and to try and keep by her side, and Ronald listened to her with a grave patience that would have been admirable if he had heard a word she said.

On one occasion Marion was putting roses into a great jar, in the gallery at Dalbraith, and Douglas, sitting on the window-sill, half in and half out of the room, was talking to her. Uncle Norman, when he saw them, refrained from passing through the gallery, though it was his only way out of the house, but retreated, with a knowing twinkle in his eyes, into the turret-room, where he had nothing to do.

Having waited there what seemed to him an unconscionable time, he ventured forth, and opened the door discreetly. "And so," he heard, "the Laird, honest man, passed the remark, that though the lad himself might not be just so solid as we wished, yet he would fain hope that poor Bob"—

"As I live; the MacMichaels again!" ejaculated the exasperated General.

At last, one evening at the Lady's Lodge, he had managed to wheedle Granny out to see the sunset. Presently he came back to warn Mamselle Ugly that her lady might find the evening air fresh without a shawl; and as she hurried off in search of one he gave a severe and significant look to Grizel, who, standing near the window, was holding forth with a placid smile, while Marion knitted, and Douglas just come in was sitting with his arms crossed on the table, in an attitude of resolute and patient waiting.

"By that, I would be understood to say, Ronald," went on Grizel, happily, "that Tibbie MacMichael is not to call a beauty. She'll not be that, but

she's a sonsie lassie 'wi' her twa pawkie een,' as the song says; and young Morrison "——

"Grizel," growled a deep peremptory voice outside the window. She jumped up—"Eh? will you be wanting me, Cousin Norman?"

He beckoned to her silently.

The two who were left did not move for a moment —then Dougals got up.

"They say it's a lovely evening," said the girl, rising too, and hurriedly throwing down her work; "shall we go out?"

"Marion," said Douglas, laying his hand on hers——

CHAPTER X

LOOKING BACK

" O May Janette, O May Janette!
An ill weird ye must dree,
If ye shall meet the fause Kennet
Beneath the trysting-tree."

One scene only, taken from the long ago.

It is the evening of the day on which Lord Douglas died. Even now yonder at Dalbraith he is lying unconscious, with hopeless eyes watching him, and upstairs Ronald is stretched out on his bed, ground down under the first hours of a long torture.

Out here by the loch-side it is a very lovely and peaceful September evening.

It is nearly dark. There is a dim glimmer here and there upon the shadowed loch, and a faint voice of wandering wind comes up from the water sighing—a whisper of wavelets sobs upon the shore. The night wind blowing inland fresh and cool, passes on with a soft, perpetual soughing through the trees in the garden of the Lady's Lodge.

Marion Stuart lingers alone on the shore. She is pale, and her eyes are heavy with tears. Alas! she is only one of the many who to-day mourn a common sorrow. The messenger came hurriedly awhile ago to bring the news, and summon her grandmother to Dalbraith; and when she was gone, Marion could not stay alone in the house. Its silence oppressed her; and still more, perhaps, did the subdued murmur from the kitchen, which

showed that the fearful tidings of the day were being eagerly discussed.

So she went down to the loch-side, and gazed across the dark water towards Dalbraith. Mysterious —still, yet ever stirring—the shining stretches swept off into the darkness and brought to her no token.

Quiet and happy, and entirely uneventful, had been Marion's life hitherto. She knew so few people, never having had any companions except the two Douglas boys, Kenneth and Ronald, that the friends on her scanty list were to her singularly important and engrossing.

A child's heroine, a girl's ideal, the object of a very quiet but real enthusiasm, was Lady Douglas to the little maiden. She was so beautiful, so noble, it was always such a pleasure to be near her, to watch how she did things—her slow movements and 'grand' ways, as others besides little Marion called her stateliness. She did not notice the girl much; but Marion had known her all her life, and was not a bit afraid of her, though to her mind Lady Douglas never quite stepped down into the realms of every-day life.

Little Marion, learning her lessons and dutifully reading her 'history books,' used to identify Lord and Lady Douglas with all the personages she most admired. He was Leonidas and Sir William Wallace. Margaret was like Joan of Arc, or Vittoria Colonna; her namesake, Queen Margaret of Anjou at the head of her troops, must have been as beautiful and brave.

Once, when Marion was quite a child, she was taken to Dalbraith to see some magic pictures that they called 'tableaux vivants.' The little girl never forgot them. Margaret and the boy Kenneth were made in one picture to represent Henry the

Sixth's luckless queen and son meeting the robber in Hexham Forest. What a noble, gracious queen, and what a frank, gallant-looking outlaw was Lord Douglas!

Then they changed the scene, and presently Margaret stood before them in her exile and desolation—

"Anjou's lone matron in her father's hall."

Lord Douglas, who had come round again among the audience, lifted up the little Marion that she might see better, and he repeated the line to her half aloud.

Colonel Douglas stood near the dethroned queen, rather too vigorous and manly a representative of poor old King René—but Margaret, with her beautiful bowed head! The grand, straight lines of her face fell easily into the mould of haughty sadness. She looked heart-broken.

It was thus that Marion had her to-night always before her sight, with that expression in her eyes. The girl, so powerless to help, would have given her life to comfort them over there. She stretched out her arms towards Dalbraith with infinite, impotent longing.

Suddenly, far off and faint, the sound of oars working in the rowlocks, reached her from the opposite shore; and, as she strained eyes and ears into the darkness, the noise grew more distinct, and an invisible boat came quickly on towards her. The oars splashed irregularly in the water, as if they were wielded by an unskilful or a reckless hand. Marion ran down to the landing-place; the boat's keel grated against the bank, and its occupant sprang on shore. It was Kenneth, pale and wild-looking in the twilight.

"How is he?" asked Marion, meeting him.

He made no answer.

"You are sorry for Ronald?" he said, presently.

"Oh, bitterly!—bitterly sorry."

"You would be sorry for any one," he continued quickly, "that such a thing happened to?"

"Of course, Kenneth; of course I should; but what does that matter? Tell me about them. How is Lord Douglas? Did you see Ronald?"

"Yes; I did. You know,"—he spoke very slowly, and with a catch in his breath—"it was I that told him."

"Oh, Kenneth!—how dreadful for you!—poor fellow!"

"Marion, give me something to eat. I am starving. Perhaps food will take away this feeling; this horrible sick horror. Quick, let us go into the house. I know Granny is away."

When he had eaten—though for all his hunger he could not swallow much—he jumped up, saying, "Now, Marion, come out again. I want to tell you something;" and Marion was frightened, for he was trembling from head to foot. "Come out," he said; "but not under the trees, for I want to see your face."

The wind, she feels, is rising, and the trees are shivering in it and moaning.

"You are sorry for Ronald?" he says, holding her hand as they stand together on the grass.

"You know I am. What is it, Kenneth?"

He is crushing her hand in his, and swinging it up and down with the unconscious force of one whose nerves are violently strung up. Marion struggles in vain to release herself; he does not even know that he is touching her.

"Look here, Marion. I am going to tell you a secret—something only one person knows. I

must tell you, or I think I shall go mad. I must tell some one, and I can trust you best. Will you swear—solemnly swear—that you will not tell any one what I tell you?"

"No, Kenneth; it would not be right."

He dashes her hand away angrily. "I suppose you want to drive me mad. I tell you I must speak to some one. Don't Marion—don't talk nonsense about oaths being wrong. I wouldn't ask you if it was wrong; but I can't speak unless you swear to keep my secret. You *must!*"

"Granny would not like it," answers the girl simply.

"You must not tell her. Good Heavens! you must not speak of it to her."

"I don't want to know your secret," says Marion, nearly crying. "Please, go away now. I can only think of poor Lord Douglas to-night."

"Don't, Marion—don't speak of him." Kenneth is violently agitated; she can hear his quick, panting breaths. "If you won't listen to me and keep my secret, I shall just go and throw myself into the loch."

Poor little Marion!—she should not have believed him, and been so direfully frightened; but already she was unnerved by the day's events. It was very eerie out there in the gloaming, with the stems of the birch-trees glimmering pale and ghost-like out of the shadows, and Kenneth's wild words and wailing voice mixing with the moan that had come into the night air. She held his arm with her little trembling hand, and tried to quiet him.

"Marion, do for pity's sake promise me, and listen. I must speak to somebody. I must—I must!"

"I think perhaps I may promise, but I can't take an oath," said Marion, trembling and considering.

There was something that sounded different—less awful, to the poor child in a promise. Kenneth gave her no time to go back.

"There, yes; it's the same thing. You have promised, Marion." He asked for the third time, "You are sorry for Ronald?"

"Why do you ask me? Oh, Kenneth, if you would let me go!—and go away yourself."

"Listen; you ought to be sorry for me, not Ronald;" and Kenneth whispered, leaning forward with his white lips close to her ear, "It was my gun, not his, that did it."

"Did what? I cannot understand. Kenneth, you terrify me!"

"You know. My gun shot—"

"Shot Lord Douglas!"——

"Hush, hush, Marion; don't scream like that!" and he put his hand roughly over her mouth.

"And you let them think it was Ronald?" cried the girl, shaking him off. "You did!"

"No, no; it was not me. Adam Haldane told me it was Ronald. I swear that I believed him when I went to Ronald,—and then he came and whispered to me that he had said that to spare me and my father—but that I did it."

"And you told no one?"

He saw her shrink away from him holding out her hands to keep him off. He saw the horror and repulsion in her face. Suddenly his mood changed; flinging himself on to the ground, he burst into a storm of wild, passionate sobs. "I thought you would pity me. It was not my fault. I thought you would comfort me—Marion, Marion!"

All the unreasoning womanly instincts of her nature awoke within Marion at the sight of him. There was no one in the world she loved as she had

always loved Kenneth. She knelt down beside him on the grass.

"It's not too late, poor Kenneth!—you can tell them. Do not cry so; you can go over to-night and tell them."

"I can't—I can't," wailed Kenneth. "It would kill my father. Oh, what has Adam done! I never would have deceived Ronald. I did not know; I never meant it."

"It is not too late," said Marion.

"Oh, I could not do it now. Every one knows now,"—a fresh burst of sobs checked him. "If only Adam hadn't done it. If only he hadn't! Marion, say something to comfort me."

"You *must* tell." Marion's voice was resolute and low from the intensity of her feeling. "You could not live without telling."

"I can't—I can't."

She rose from the ground where she had been kneeling by him. "Then, Kenneth, I shall tell for you."

"You cannot; you have promised." The new fear calmed him, and he got up and stood facing her. "Remember that; remember your oath."

"Not an oath," murmured Marion faintly.

"Your promise then—it's the same thing."

She clasped her hands over her breast, and the look almost of a martyr came into her face and made it rapt and motionless in its woe, but she made no resistance. Her word, though half-unconsciously given, was sacred to her. He had trapped her in his grasping after sympathy, and she was helpless in the toils.

"You cannot speak—neither to Granny, nor to any one in the world. You understand that, Marion."

A long sigh came from her lips for answer.

"I could not have borne it alone," he went on rapidly. "It was too horrible. I was afraid I should shout it out before them all—before my father,"—he shuddered. "I wanted to get to you, Marion—only to you."

The burst of almost hysterical sobs had relieved him; he spoke more coherently now, though Marion stood there like a statue, and made him no reply.

"I would give my right hand that it had not happened so—but I can't speak yet. I can't break my father's heart. I couldn't face him."

"But Ronald,"—Marion just managed to articulate the words.

"You only think of Ronald; but that's not the worst—that's not what haunts me—drives me mad. It is to think that my shot hit—poor Douglas." He put his hands on both sides of his head, and rocked himself to and fro.

"How is he?" asked Marion presently.

"I don't know—they said there was no hope." After a few minutes he began again, unable in his restless misery to bear the silence. "I don't know much. It was too dreadful at Dalbraith. I could not stay there. My father told me to go to Ronald, but I could not do that. The house was dreadful down-stairs after dark; so silent, and with the dinner laid in the dining-room, and nobody to eat it. I was afraid some one would come into the hall and find me, so I came out, and then I saw the lights here shining across the water, and I thought you would have something to say to make it better."

But Marion had nothing—only another passionate entreaty that he would tell his father.

He did not reply, but leant moodily over the garden-gate, staring across the loch that had grown

nearly black now, for the twilight was over, and there was no moon.

"After all," he said, presently, "it cannot make so very much difference whose shot it was. It was an accident, and people are not blamed for an accident, are they? I heard everybody pitying Ronald. They all pitied him. You did too, Marion. It was less dreadful for him than it would have been for me; that was what Adam said. They were all awfully sorry for Ronald. If I had known how my father and all would feel about it, it wouldn't have been so hard to speak. Oh, I wish I had at once, without caring for what Adam said. If my father had looked at me as he did at Ronald I could have borne it. He said, 'I understand it all, my boy;' but I don't think Ronald cared, or heard him even."

"Your father is always kind," said Marion, with a sudden gleam of hope; "he would be kind now, and so sorry for you. Oh, do go to him; you will be so thankful when he knows."

He looked at her doubtfully for a moment, and her heart rose up within her; but it was only for a moment.

"You don't know my father," he said, and he sank back into his attitude of despair; "he has never been displeased with you."

Too well Kenneth knew his father's stern, simple code in which to be ungenerous was to be dishonoured, and to swerve by a hair's breadth from the truth was to be guilty of a lie. "It is no use; I cannot—and I will not!"

There was something in the way he said those last words that carried conviction and hopelessness to Marion.

She did not entreat him any more. She did not struggle against her fate; but she felt as she stood

there as if a dark, cold, heavy garment had been suddenly wrapped round her, shutting her out from the sunshine and the music, and the lightsomeness of life.

"I will pray to God, Kenneth," she said, gently; "perhaps some day soon He will give you strength to speak." Kenneth would not turn his head as she went away; he hung over the gate, half angry with her, half dazed with the horror of his position.

His story was unfortunately too true. Adam Haldane was the only person near him when he fired his fatal shot. Kenneth had been put out, and would not listen to the old soldier who warned him that he was shooting carelessly, and pushing forward so fast as to be dangerously near his cousin. When Adam knew that Lord Douglas had been hit, his first quick, cunning impulse was to shield Kenneth at any one's expense. He had no grudge against Ronald, but he was the heir, and everybody about the place loved him better than they did Kenneth. They would not be hard on him. And this catastrophe, if he knew the truth, would go far, Adam thought, to break the Colonel's heart.

His instinct was to deceive. He followed it in this instance almost without reasoning; but afterwards, he was glad of what he had done. No one suspected the mistake between the cousins. His story passed unchallenged. His only blunder, he thought, lay in having told Kenneth himself the truth. He expected to have won the boy's gratitude, and was frightened at his burst of reproach and horror. It was hard to get him, in his first agony of despair, to keep the secret. That was a real danger, and seriously alarmed Adam. The disclosure once made now, he himself would be exiled from Colonel Douglas's presence for ever, and that

would be a sentence worse than death to the false, faithless heart. But he knew of old how to work on the son's fear of his father, as well as on his love, and skilfully he set about his task. Poor little Marion had a powerful opponent. Kenneth wavered for a time between the two influences—the good and the bad—but Adam strained every nerve, for he knew that each day made his cause stronger. The confession, which would have been hard enough at first, grew to look more and more impossible as the days rolled on, and still Kenneth hesitated.

Colonel Douglas himself unconsciously increased the difficulty.

On the day of Lord Douglas's funeral, Ronald stood tearless and passive—moving, standing, kneeling, where he was put—his face never changing, as the words of prayer, of resignation, of joyful hope sounded in his ears. Some people thought him unfeeling, and by them Kenneth's demeanour was judged to be much more touching. Perhaps his grief was in its way as sincere. His eyes fixed themselves wistfully over and over again on his cousin's face. He turned more and more ashy pale as the service went on, and when the clods of earth fell heavily on to the coffin, a stifled cry broke from him, and he stopped his ears to shut out the sounds he could not bear.

After all was over, Colonel Douglas found him lying on the grass, his face hidden, shaken all over by the sobs he had tried to suppress before. His father stood still and touched him with his foot. This excessive demonstration of sorrow appeared to him unmanly. Kenneth sprang up instantly, the colour rushing over his face.

"Can you do nothing to help your cousin?" asked Colonel Douglas rather contemptuously, for

he had noticed, and been vexed by Kenneth's avoidance of Ronald. "You don't do much for him by giving way to your own feelings like this."

"Father," broke from Kenneth, "I am more miserable than he is."

"What do you mean by that?" asked his father, after a moment's astonished pause, his grey eyebrows drawing together.

Kenneth struggled to reply. There was a spasm in his throat, and his heart was beating as if it was going to burst. His voice was almost gone, but a wild longing to speak and to be rid of his burden was upon him. He raised his eyes to his father's face.

"Well, Kenneth?"

The brief stern tone, the flash of the keen eyes as they fastened on his face, seemed to paralyse him. His head swam; his gleam of desperate courage faded away.

"I mean that I am as sorry as Ronald," he said indistinctly, grasping for support at the tree near which he stood.

When his father spoke again, his voice had wonderfully softened. "Kenneth, you little know," he said sorrowfully. "God grant you may never suffer as that poor boy is suffering now—entirely blameless as he is."

Kenneth gave a deep sigh. The chance of speaking was fast slipping away. A rush of mingled relief and disappointment overwhelmed him. Colonel Douglas went on with unusual gentleness: "My boy, I think it might almost break my heart to know there was such a load laid on you, as in God's mysterious Providence poor Ronald is now bearing. Only one thing, only one, could be worse to me —to know that you had ever acted dishonourably."

In terror, Kenneth looked up. No; there was not a shadow of suspicion on his father's face. Again he sighed, but this time with a more complete relief. Those words seemed in some measure to justify his silence. Surely even Marion would not bid him break his father's heart. And for Ronald there was such pity—such deep sympathy felt. It was not so bad for him. Colonel Douglas spoke of him almost with respect, as of one suffering innocently. He had called Ronald blameless. But what would he say of his own son if the truth were known? Still, when Colonel Douglas had gone on, and he was left alone, he flung himself back upon the grass, and tore it up with his hands, muttering, "Coward—coward—coward!" below his breath.

As long as Kenneth remained at home, the poor little sharer of his secret lived in a perfect fever of hope. He would tell his father. He had all but promised her to speak to-morrow. Perhaps before she saw him again it would all be known, and Marion's temples throbbed, her cheeks burnt and her hands were as cold as ice. All night she slept restlessly, or lay awake wondering how it had fared with him, and when the first gleam of morning shone into her room she jumped out of bed to look out of the window towards Norman's Tower. She only saw the mist rise and float quietly away from the surface of the loch, and flocks of early awaking birds skim across the water; and in the cold calmness of the dawn she would lose hope, to regain it an hour or two afterwards in double measure, when the sun rose up and painted the world with gay colours and golden gleams.

But Kenneth never came to tell her what she longed to hear. One glance at him when they met, a shake of the head if there were others present,

an impatient turning away from her imploring eyes, and her heart sank down like lead. To one of her nature—scrupulously upright, brave, and justice-loving to a singular degree—any secret was a painful burden, but when it entailed suffering and unfairness to another she rebelled against it with all her heart and soul. And yet she could not hate Kenneth, cruel and selfisn though she was forced to think his conduct. The child's heart clung to its old idol still. All would be well if it were not for Adam Haldane. It was almost as great a comfort to Marion as to Kenneth to lay the blame on him. People talk of broken idols, but there is nothing in the world more difficult to break. They may be cast down, once and again—their worshippers will only raise them up and cling to them more closely than before.

Kenneth went away at last without speaking, leaving her to bear the secret alone, and then Marion broke down. The fever which had been supporting her went away, and for a time she was really very ill.

No one wondered. Things at Dalbraith were sad enough just then to make any one ill. Lady Beatrix nursed her, and "Ugly" watched beside her, and was good and comfortable, just as she used to be when Marion was three years old. The two talked much of Kenneth, and the girl liked to hear how good and handsome a little child he used to be.

While she was getting well she thought a great deal, and a quiet determination grew up in her mind to give her whole life, as far as she could, as an expiation of the wrong that had been done. How this resolution was to be carried out she scarcely knew. Perhaps some day the way would be made clear to her. It might be that she should yet prevail on Kenneth to tell all. It might be

that in some way she could serve Ronald or his mother. She must at least prepare for her work by being strong, and watchful, and patient. Her own wishes she tried to set steadily on one side, and by slow degrees she became, if it possible to be so, almost too self-controlled.

"Marion is old beyond her years. We have lost our children, Ugly," said Lady Beatrix, with a sigh.

It was very long before Kenneth returned to Dalbraith. During his holidays his father was often with his regiment, or if he was on leave he took his son abroad. Kenneth was intended for the Bar; and at other times they heard of him as working hard at Oxford, or going somewhere with a reading-party. All his tutors gave as their opinion that his clear head and keen, quick, reasoning powers promised great distinction in a learned profession. He had always been ambitious. London, Parliament, and office at some future day, used to be his boyish dreams.

His father acquiesced with a sigh. In his heart of hearts he thought either the army or the navy, the fittest profession for a gentleman and a Douglas, but the boy had a right to follow his own bent, and he ought to be very proud of having such a clever son. It was a great surprise to him, when about four years after Lord Douglas's death, Kenneth announced his strong wish to go into the army.

Norman Douglas was on the eve of getting his promotion. His severance with the active part of his profession was a pang, and he could not help a secret thrill of pleasure at any prospect that would still give him a connecting link with it. Openly, he grumbled; called his son a capricious young dog, and wondered what freak had come over the rascal now. A soldier's life was no such bed of roses, he

could assure Master Kenneth; he might have to rough it a little more than in those comfortable chambers in the Temple he used to be so fond of talking about.

"I wonder what can have made him wish to change," said Lady Beatrix, for the twentieth time.

"I suppose the fellow feels the stirring of the old blood in him after all," replied the General, smiling and throwing up his head like a war-horse.

"And you give your consent, Norman?" asked Granny.

"I dare say the young Jack-a-napes will end by getting his own way; he seems pretty much bent on it;" and General Douglas tapped the letter he held with his glasses and tried not to look too much gratified.

He got Kenneth a commission in the Guards, and not very long afterwards the Crimean war began.

Marion hoped against hope that he would come home, if only for a few days, before he went out to the East. His battalion was under orders, but still she expected him to the last. He would not go, surely, to face danger, and perhaps death, with the burden of his secret on him!—the time had come when he was certain to speak, for her sake, for Ronald's, for his own. But General Douglas went up to London to see him off, and Kenneth wrote his farewell to Granny—nothing was said. Would he speak to his father just before he sailed? It would be so easy on the eve of such a parting. When the General came back, Marion eagerly scanned his face. It was grave, a little anxious, but perfectly serene and satisfied; and a sore, hurt, angry feeling rose up in her heart, to be presently

dashed down again, and turned into tender remorse, by the news of the Alma.

And so that weary winter went on. Marion was always with General Douglas, sharing with him the bitter hours of the long protracted suspense. How could she keep any displeasure in her heart against one of the soldiers who were before Sebastopol? Kenneth had escaped from the battles unhurt, but in the spring he was wounded in the trenches, and invalided home.

Perhaps no time had ever been as happy as this was to the young man. General Douglas hurried to Southampton to meet him, and as his father held him to his heart and thanked God for having spared his life, Kenneth almost felt as if he should be glad to die while life was so full of blessing.

He very soon recovered his health sufficiently to join a battalion of his regiment that was quartered at the Tower, and everybody in London was very kind to the young wounded soldier. In some way, unaccountable even to himself, his year in the Crimea seemed to have separated him by a wide gulf from his previous life. He felt as if the past lay far behind him. The old trouble ceased for a time to haunt him, and he no longer looked on Marion as the arbitress of his fate. Kenneth threw himself with a good deal of spirit into his life in London; he made many friends, went to a number of parties, and enjoyed his popularity very much.

Sometimes he thought of getting leave and going down to Dalbraith. It would look strange if he put it off too long, but the idea gave him a cold shiver, and he pushed it away. He heard that Marion's father, Sir Charles Stuart, was coming home from India, and both she and her grandmother

would be too much engrossed with him, to have a thought to spare for anybody else.

Besides Marion—he was sure Marion would want to rake up the past again, and was it not better to leave things as they were? Surely they had all suffered enough. Now Douglas was amusing himself abroad, and he (Kenneth) had seen the reality of war, and the grim face of death, and had left his boyhood with its mistakes behind.

It would be wiser for them all not to revive a terrible family history, the memory of which, except to those immediately concerned, was beginning to grow fainter. And—London was delightful—people were very kind indeed to him. Above all his father seemed proud of him and pleased with him. He was really beginning rather to enjoy his life, for the first time in all these years. He had better keep away from Dalbraith a little longer.

One night he had come up from Windsor, where he was at present quartered, to go to a great ball. As he reached the head of the crowded staircase he encountered Lady Douglas's brother Harold, now Lord Sandysmere, making his way leisurely towards the door. "How are you, Kenneth?" said the older man. "I have done my duty here, and am making my escape. You have just come, I suppose. Have you seen your people?"

"My people?" repeated Kenneth.

"Yes; your uncle—cousin—what is he? Sir Charles Stuart, and little Marion. She is here this evening with her father."

"Marion here!" exclaimed Kenneth.

"To be sure. Did you not know she was in London? Her grandmother brought her up to meet her father. Well, you will find her in one of the rooms, and looking very pretty too. Come,

there's a break in the crowd; our hostess is looking another way; I shall slip off." And Lord Sandysmere lost himself ingeniously in the throng.

The band was playing rather a noisy valse as Kenneth made his way into the long gallery; but for the moment the beating of his heart drowned all other sounds. Marion Stuart here—Marion Stuart! —how should he meet her, his little cousin, love, and playmate, Marion?

Eagerly he scanned all the faces that were within his ken, staring absently at some very familiar ones without perceiving their greetings to himself; seeking vainly the one face that had haunted him in its pleading earnestness, against his will, for years. He could not see her as he threaded his way as quickly as he could through the crowd, passing hastily from one room to the other. In the ball-room he paused to look through one set of dancers after another.

Kenneth had got rather a reputation as a good dancer, and several of his accustomed partners looked at him expectantly and wonderingly as he passed them by. But he did not want to dance or to amuse himself to-night—he wanted to find Marion.

At last, nearly at the end of the long room, backed by the heavy curtain of one of the windows, he caught sight of a face that sent all the blood to his heart with a sudden shock. Not dancing at the instant—standing quietly waiting while her partner performed *cavalier seul* in front of her—with her eyes fixed seriously on the shifting figures in the quadrille before her,—with the attentive and earnest look of old—was Marion.

Yes; tall—taller than he had expected—straight, slight, very fair, with the eyes that were of almost too dark and full a blue to match entirely with the

masses of her blonde shining hair; with the dear, old, never-forgotten look of candour, trust-worthiness, and serenity. Yes—he had found Marion.

The music clashed out more loudly. She moved forwards, her partner spoke to her, and she bent towards him to answer; some one greeted her as she crossed the room, and she smiled and nodded, but all very quietly, and in a way that made Kenneth feel there was something unusual and remarkable about her. He stood leaning against the wall, watching her with almost a dream-like sensation.

Marion at a London ball! Marion unaware and heedless of his presence! Marion listening calmly to her partner's inane speeches (for Kenneth was sure they were inane, and that he must be a prig); Marion who alone shared his secret, and with whom he had fancied so many meetings, and held such long imaginary conversations! She was to have been walking towards him across a purple moor, or standing on the shore of the loch with her eyes shaded by her hand, watching for his boat. Instead, she was dancing in a London ball-room, without a thought of him! It seemed to jar him all through, and if he could have made up his mind to cease watching her, he would have left the house at once. But he stood immovable, and never took his eyes off her. To the world at large—at least to that very small portion which concerned itself about him—it appeared as if the lady with whom he wished to dance had chosen another partner, and that he was looking on in jealous indignation. Perhaps that was not so far from the truth. He did not like to see Marion dancing with some one else. Besides, a moment ago her expression, and the quaint gravity with which she moved, had brought back to him with curious distinctness the image of the

little child who used to dance minuets with him in the firelight, years and years ago.

It was the same face still, only not sunburnt as it was then, and far, far more womanly and sweet; but the lines had only strengthened into greater precision, and the noble look of candour had remained.

Suddenly, as he studied her face thus intently, Marion raised her head, which had been bent down to listen to her partner (he was shorter than she was, Kenneth did not fail to observe), she looked up, her eyes caught his, and he knew in a moment, from her change of countenance, that she had recognized him.

She coloured deeply as she met his fixed, melancholy gaze; he half smiled, and before she had time to return the smile her partner claimed her attention. Kenneth watched her turn back with painstaking patience to the business in hand; just, he said to himself, as little Marion used to refuse to let her thoughts wander to the ponies or the boat, before she had mastered her daily portion of "Mrs. Magnall's Questions."

Kenneth moved now from his post of observation, and coasted round the room behind the dancers as quickly as he could. One or two people tried to stop him. He was an especial favourite with old ladies. To-night there was a worthy dowager, whose carriage he always found for her, left in speechless despair, as her charming Mr. Douglas glided past with only a sweet smile, and the briefest possible good-night.

The last figure was being danced at last, the music approached its final flourish, and as Marion turned from executing a curtsey that had descended straight from generations of Beaurepaire ancestors, and was much too good to be wasted on a modern ball-room, she found Kenneth standing close behind her.

"Marion," he said, holding out his hand. She gave him hers, her colour deepened again, and her eyes fell.

"You have not forgotten me?" he asked.

She smiled a little, and shook her head. "No, indeed, that is not likely."

But it was easier to look at her from a distance than to talk to her. Kenneth tried to collect his thoughts, but it was some moments before he remembered to ask after Granny.

"Granny is very well," replied Marion without looking up; but she did not move away, and her late partner, tired of waiting for her unnoticed, walked off huffily. Neither of them heeded his departure.

"How very little I dreamt of meeting you here to-night," continued Kenneth, still casting about for something to keep up a semblance of talk.

"They are cousins of Granny's husband," answered Marion, lucidly.

"Of your grandfather, Sir James Stuart? so they are," and Kenneth tried to recover his London manner. "I had forgotten the connexion, but I thought of course you were in Scotland."

"I came to London with Granny to meet my father."

"And I was fancying you at Dalbraith. Marion, you might have let me know."

She bent over a table covered with roses of various tints, and Kenneth looked at her. "I wonder if she is thinking of *that*," he said to himself.

Two girls passed near them; the elder was evidently initiating a pretty little newly-fledged sister in the ways of the world.

"Look, that is Kenneth Douglas," she said, and both Kenneth and Marion heard her quite clearly. "If he is introduced to you, mind you dance with him. Nobody in London valses half so well."

Marion turned away from the roses, and quietly raising her eyes looked full at Kenneth for a moment. "She *is* thinking of that," he said to himself. "She wonders how I can be so frivolous." She seemed to him to have scanned him in that glance from head to foot.

"Marion," he began impetuously; and then checked himself. This was neither the place nor the time for explanations. "Marion," he resumed in a changed tone, "I want to see your father. Let us go and find him, and then I will take you to have some supper."

Just then a fair young man, rather out of breath, came towards them quickly through the crowd. He was the son of the house. "I am looking for my new cousin," he said, stopping before Marion; "and my mother says I am to take her in to supper. May I?"

Marion hesitated; she was new to the world's ways, and a message from the mistress of the house sounded to her very much like a command. She half withdrew her arm from Kenneth, who bowed and immediately stood back.

"I beg your pardon," said the other young man, looking at him.

"Not at all; it's all right;" and Kenneth bent his head again rather stiffly; and then Marion and the new-comer walked away together. He stood looking after them. It was a reversal of his relations with Marion that mortified and put him out. He had always hitherto been the leader, the conferrer of favours, the splendid young prince and patron. Here he was of no account compared with her.

But he was almost glad she was gone just now. Something in her face and voice so tried his self-command, that he felt as if in another minute or two it might have given way.

Oh the past!—how it had started up and become real again. The brightly lighted room, with the music, and the dancers, and the hum of voices had faded away; and instead he was surrounded by a twilit garden where the wind was soughing among the trees, and a child's awe-stricken white face was bent over him in his agony of remorse. It was a spectral scene with which he was but too familiar. He tried, as he had so often done before, to drive it away; it would not be lightly dismissed to-night.

The music of a valse rang out; the girl who had praised his dancing was standing not far off. He went up hastily and asked her to dance. Presently the music and the whirling motion seemed to get into his head; his partner was worthy of him—she laughed gaily as they quickened their pace down the long room; Kenneth's colour came back—his heart beat—they went on longer and faster than any one else; and when they paused at last he saw Marion just opposite to him, standing in a door-way between her young host and a tall dark man whom he guessed to be her father, with her serious eyes looking quietly towards him.

He had to go on dancing after that, but the zest and the spirit were gone; he felt almost giddy, and the music stunned him with its swinging, never-ending measure. When it stopped at last, the door-way where she had been standing was empty—at least an enormously stout ambassador and a white-headed cabinet minister were discussing something eagerly on the spot where he last saw her.

As soon as he could dispose of his partner, Kenneth left the ball-room; but by this time people were beginning to go away. The staircase was crowded, and it was almost equally difficult to get up or down. When he reached the hall he found that Sir Charles

Stuart had gone into the outer vestibule to call for the carriage, and Marion was waiting patiently in the cloak-room for the little tight bundle into which her white cloak had been reduced. There was a chance of a moment's *tête-à-tête*, for her escort, intent on his hospitable duties, had left her, and was dancing vigorously overhead.

But—" Mr. Douglas," said a voice behind him, " I am alone to-night; will you be very kind, and just see if my servant has gone for the carriage? "

There was no help for it. When he returned one or two people had come downstairs, and were talking to Marion.

" Won't you come out into the hall? " he asked impatiently. " Your father will never find you here."

" Has the carriage come? " said Marion, as she took his arm, but he did not hear her question.

" I hope you are not going to stay in London long," he said abruptly.

" Why? " inquired Marion, opening her eyes.

" I don't like to see you here," he rejoined hurriedly. " One can't have a word with you "—a moment's pause—" You are too good for London, Marion."

" Sir Charles Stuart's carriage stops the way."

" There—of course—I told you so. Come along. I had rather think of you at Dalbraith."

" Perhaps you don't very often remember Dalbraith now," she said, in her quiet way. He turned towards her quickly and their eyes met. Some unspoken significance in the words struck them at the same moment—both coloured deeply.

" Marion, are you coming? " called her father, and Kenneth took her through the hall rapidly, and put her into the carriage without another word.

" Good-night," said Sir Charles, as he followed her.

"May I come and see Lady Beatrix to-morrow?" asked Kenneth, but he hardly heard the answer, the carriage was so quickly hustled out of the way, and shouts of "Mrs. Hamilton Simpson's carriage" filled the air.

"Who was that young fellow whom you seem to have frumped, Marion?" asked Sir Charles as they drove down Piccadilly. "I wasn't introduced, but I thought him very good-looking."

"It was Kenneth, father; Kenneth Douglas."

"What? Norman's boy, the guardsman? You don't say so. Why did you not tell me? We ought to have asked him to dinner, or luncheon, or something. I meant to come and make acquaintance with your friend, and then I was in such a fuss about the carriage. I thought they were going to keep us there all night. Really!—so that was dear old Norman's son. I am sorry I didn't know."

"He will come to see Granny," said Marion.

"Ah, I dare say. Well, Marion, how did you like your ball? I wonder how many years it is since I was at a party in that house. I was quite a boy, just going out to India, and it was in the old Lord's time."

When she reached her room Marion stood at the window for a long time looking out.

She had often watched the sun-rise at Dalbraith, but never before had seen the pure, clear, lovely light that comes stealing over the smoke-dried roofs of London houses, before the great city wakes up and lights its fires.

"I have seen Kenneth," she said, half aloud at last as she turned away; but her heart was still beating fast, and she shivered as she lay down in her bed, and watched with weary yet excited eyes, the faint touches and bars of light that lay upon her curtain, the pale fingermarks of the dawn.

CHAPTER XI

WESTMINSTER CHIMES

"We twa ha'e run about the braes,
And pu'd the gowans fine,
But we've wandered mony a weary foot
Sin' auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidl't i' the burn,
From morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid ha'e roar'd
Sin' auld lang syne."

MARION and her grandmother were staying in one of those old-fashioned houses in Whitehall, the gardens of which used to reach down to the edge of the river.

Its mistress, Miss Montrose of Dunethar, was one of the oldest friends that Lady Beatrix possessed. They had been young girls together in Edinburgh, and had never lost their love for one another during the long course of their widely-differing lives. Miss Montrose's house had always been the home of Lady Beatrix during her rare visits to England. It was a pretty old house, and moreover, there were few pleasanter ones to be found in London.

Old Miss Montrose was a woman who had lived a great deal in the world, and had made friends wherever she went. She had been a great wit in her day—perhaps a little bit of a "blue-stocking," but she was full of talent and charm, and distinguished men almost always took to her.

There were people coming and going in her house all day long—clever people well worth meeting—

idle people who came to see the clever ones—struggling people, in the morning, who wanted her advice and help—tired people, in the evening, who were glad after the day's work, to have the rest and refreshment of her kindness and pleasant talk.

Lady Beatrix, long unaccustomed to the bustle of London, used to escape to her own room to rest, but the hostess never seemed tired. She sat all day in the library overlooking the river, with an old-fashioned white drawn-silk bonnet on her head, often writing her letters while her visitors talked to one another, or sat under the trees in her strip of garden.

There was a tranquil effect about it all that was doubled by the consciousness of the teeming life and hurry of the surrounding town. The house itself was quiet, lying far back from the turmoil of the noisy streets, and looking out on the other side over the silent highway of the river.

There were several people in Miss Montrose's library when Kenneth made his appearance there on the afternoon after he had met Marion. A round tea-table stood in one corner; voices came in from the garden; at the foot of the steps leading to it he could see Marion standing, and a young man, who looked like a foreigner, was leaning over the balustrade beside her.

"Granny" came to greet him with her own quiet but ardent warmth of welcome. She had not seen him since he went to the Crimea, and she drew him down on to the sofa by her side, with a thousand loving anxious inquiries. "You are still looking pale, Kenneth. Are you quite strong again, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, Granny; thanks. I am all right now."

"And you are quartered at Windsor? That is very hard when we are in London—we who never

come. You must come up as often as you can while we are here. I want to hear all about the battles. Ah, my boy, we thought of you."

Kenneth answered and smiled, but still his eyes would wander to the window.

"I saw Marion last night," he said presently.

"Ah, yes; at that fine ball—and she never showed you to her father. You know I have him at home now, Kenneth. Imagine whether I am happy."

"Yes; I heard. I was so glad, Granny;" then he peeped again under the striped sun-blind, and asked, "Who is that down there with Marion?"

She leant forward. "Oh, that is Agénor de Beaurepaire, my cousin René's youngest son. René sent him to me. He is just named attaché here, and he comes to see us often. He seems a nice, good boy."

"How tall Marion has grown."

"Has not she?—ah, she does not know you are here, and she will scold me. Let us call her."

They went and stood in the window together. "Come up here, children," said Lady Beatrix. "Marion, here is Kenneth."

Marion looked up, and began rather slowly to ascend the steps. At the same moment Miss Montrose came back from seeing some friends off in the adjoining room, and Kenneth was presented to her.

"Ah, a Crimean hero," she said kindly. "We don't know how to make enough of them; do we, Marion?"

"How do you do, Kenneth," said Marion's clear grave voice at the same moment.

Kenneth felt very uncomfortable at being called a hero in Marion's presence; he could not help wondering what she thought about it. The others went on talking, and she stood looking at the cup

she was holding in her hand. He began watching her again as he had done last night, and trying to guess at her thoughts—he could not, for thinking of her, attend to what was being said round him.

"Kenneth," said Lady Beatrix, touching his arm, "Miss Montrose is speaking to you."

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, starting.

"I was only asking you if you had been home to Dalbraith since you came from the Crimea."

"No," he said, "not yet—I hope,"—and he hesitated,—"that I shall get leave soon."

"Ah, what a welcome they will give you; their Highland laddie safe again from the wars."

Kenneth felt more and more uncomfortable.

"Only," he said, trying to make some answer, "that we have not been fighting the French."

"Ah no," rejoined Agénor de Beaurepaire possessing himself of Lady Beatrix's hand and kissing it in his little empressé French way; "we are friends now for ever. Is it not so, Madame?"

"Your cousin, Lord Douglas, is still abroad, is he not?" again asked Miss Montrose.

"I believe he is coming home by Japan and China," replied Kenneth in a low voice.

"He will be jealous of your laurels," said another lady. "They think so much of soldiers in the Highlands. You will quite have cut him out at home."

He looked up embarrassed, and his eyes met those of Marion. Both coloured crimson, just as they had done last night.

Was it his fault, thought Kenneth, that people would say such things? Would Marion think him vain as well as heartless, coming before her to boast of being a Crimean hero—he to whom she must always bring associations so widely different. He could not bear that she should think ill of him.

She might not know how he disliked the kindly flattery—and then those dreadful allusions to Ronald. It was very hard on him. Ah, if she could tell what a load he carried on his breast! (It had been heavy enough since their meeting last night.) He gave a deep sigh, true and perfectly unconscious; then he found that Marion was looking at him earnestly, but the moment he perceived it, she turned away again.

Lady Beatrix spoke to him, and he strove to bear his part in the talk, and to be, or at least to seem, gay and well at ease. Once or twice he attempted to address Marion, but as he recovered himself she grew colder, graver, more silent than before.

She looked like a quiet, beautiful, severe young judge, with her downcast eyes, and the pure outline of her face.

Could she really be Marion, his little champion of old days, his childish friend? What would the whole world be to him, he felt suddenly, if he had lost her love. Oh, if he could only be half-an-hour alone with her. Why did she remain so persistently in the centre of this ring of strangers?

Guests went and came. Lord Sandysmere had come in, and was speaking to Marion.

"Yes, I like London," she said, in answer to a question; "at least I like this house. I do not think it can be pleasant to live in a noisy street."

"Well," observed Miss Montrose, "I never want to go into the country. All the year round I have my five smoky trees, and my black sparrows, and my river to look at, and I am content."

"Some day," said Lord Sandysmere, "they will be making a great embankment along the river, like the quays in Paris, and you will lose your garden and your view."

"I hope I may be dead first," she answered energetically.

"The quays in Paris are fine," observed Agénor with gravity.

"Yes," said Lady Beatrix; "but the river! I lose all my time looking out of my window at the crowds of boats—and it is so beautiful at night."

"Ah, the 'péni-boat,'" said Agénor. "I never tire to watch them; they go so fast—piff."

"Kenneth has not seen the 'péni-boat,'" said Harold. "Take him down to see them from the terrace, Marion. I want to talk to Granny about a letter I have got from Margaret."

"Will you come?" gravely asked Marion.

Kenneth followed her, and so did Agénor.

"Margaret has not heard yet from Ronald," they heard Lord Sandysmere say, as they walked away.

"Do you go to the ball to-night?" asked Agénor, as neither of his companions spoke.

"No," answered Marion, "I don't often go to balls."

"But there are so many," he continued. "I cannot go to all. One wishes to do right, but it is embarrassing to choose."

"You had better ask my cousin," said Marion; "he can tell you all about the balls."

"I—I hate them," exclaimed Kenneth.

"Do you?" she replied quietly.

They had reached the terrace that overhung the river. The "péni-boats" were rushing by at full speed—passing each other again and again, as they raced up and down the stream—the barges floated deliberately—great ships came sailing up, and small rowing-boats darted in and out among them all. Beyond lay the opposite bank and the docks, with church spires and tall chimneys rising

out of a mist of grey and gold, that was made of smoke and sunset.

Some one called to Agénor from the house, and he left them.

"It is beautiful, I think," said Marion, standing still to look over the river; "odd, but beautiful, with the pale red haze on the other side, and the windows gleaming through it here and there like fire, and the black boats in front—"

"Marion," interrupted Kenneth abruptly, "you may suppose that I forget, but I never do—no; not for an hour."

She drew a quick breath and leant over the terrace-wall.

"You may say what you choose, and pretend that I only care for balls and gaiety and trash; of course I cannot prevent you from thinking what you please—but you might have a little kindness —a little common consideration—if only for the sake of the days you have forgotten."

She made a little inarticulate interjection, half of wonder, half of indignation.

"Though you have tried to sting me by every word you said, I have been patient, because I do believe you have some feeling for me still, different as you are from all that I have dreamt and hoped for. Give me a little time to get used to the new Marion. I do not know her yet—and then we will talk about the balls as much as you please."

"Nonsense," she said, a little impatiently.

"Nonsense; ah, well, I wish it were nonsense. Are your words and looks nonsense, and my thoughts? See, Marion, I did not think it was *you* who would visit on me so heavily the mistakes and the wrong-doing of others. In all these years I have counted on you—on your sympathy, on your understanding

of the cruel bar that has been thrown across my life. I have said to myself sometimes, 'Well, Marion knows—the pain, and the doubt, and the motive of my actions. She saw, and she knew it all.'"

He paused, and appeared to be expecting an answer, but though she raised her eyes slowly to his face, she did not speak.

"It seems I am mistaken," he said, looking at her steadily. "It seems that time changes every one. I never thought it would change you, Marion."

"I have not changed," she said, in a low voice.

He gave a short laugh. "Do you think *my* little Marion, the Marion I knew, would have met me as you did last night, with a bow and a smile, and a few words when she had a minute to spare from other people; and a sort of doubt, not quite expressed, but civilly implied, whether Dalbraith was a place I still happened to remember or not?"

"You are unfair, Kenneth."

"No; for those words cut, Marion, whether they were meant to hurt or not."

"They were not meant," she said.

"Not meant?—not meant really? Say that again, and give me your hand. I am too ready, too glad to believe what I long to believe. I will not say again you meant to be unkind, but I have dreamt of seeing you once more, longed for it, thought of it out there by night and day, pictured to myself what we should say to one another—and you would not even speak to me for five minutes when we met, but went away with the first stranger you came across."

"Kenneth, you know I could not help that."

"No; well—Heaven knows I don't want to be unreasonable, and to meet unexpectedly like that, was hard on you as well as on me—I dare say we

neither of us quite knew what we were about; but to-day, just now, when you told that French boy that I thought of nothing but balls; when you looked at me—do you think I don't know your face?—do you think I could help feeling that you were hard, and cruel, and unjust?"

She shook her head slightly. "No?—did I judge wrongly again? After last night I may not have been fit to decide anything very coolly, but can you deny that in your looks, and your manner, and your words, there has been a meaning,—a something, that seemed to imply blame? Answer me that, Marion."

He had gone on so quickly from one thing to another, without giving her a chance of speaking, that as yet she had attempted no reply. And indeed everything he said—his reproaches, the way he looked at things—only served to bewilder her more and more. He stopped now resolutely, waiting for her to speak, and she tried with all her power of self-control to summon up strength to do so quietly and truly.

"Kenneth, you know," she begun, and then her voice failed. In what words could she clothe her meaning the most tenderly, the least woundingly?

"Well, Marion," he said softly. "I know—"

"You know how I have grieved for you—always. I have thought of it all this time, and hoped, but—" she stopped again.

"Go on," he repeated, looking at her fixedly.

"You know too that there is something I have always felt that you were bound to do"—she felt his sudden start and change, both of attitude and expression, but she steadied her heart and voice: "If I have seemed to blame you, you know why it is."

In his turn he made no answer for a time. One or two people whom neither of them knew came up on to the terrace, looked down at the river, glanced at the two standing there with a little curiosity perhaps, and passed on. Till they were quite gone out of hearing he did not move or speak.

"Yes," he said then, in a concentrated voice, as if he was putting a great strain on himself, "I suppose I expected too much. I suppose the person I used to turn to in my thoughts, on whose understanding and sympathy I counted so much, *was* an imaginary person, after all. You were only a child. How could you understand?"

"But, Kenneth, though it was so hard on you—"

"Oh," he said, with an impatient gesture, "you need not explain. I bow to your decision. I accept your blame. So be it."

"Kenneth," she exclaimed, in a choked voice, "Oh Kenneth! if you only knew—if you only knew—"

"Well, I am listening."

But she wrung her hands together, for she could not speak intelligibly.

"If I only knew what? That you are sorry for me after all,—is that what you mean? You well may be, Marion."

She made a desperate effort. "If you knew all that Ronald has suffered."

"Oh," he answered slowly, "you meant that; if I knew what Ronald has suffered—while my life has been so happy, I suppose? Now listen, Marion. Did you ever love any one very much, and care about their being fond of you? All my life long—(you may think all this ridiculous if you please, I don't much care now)—I have been struggling to be something to my father, and you ask me to make

him hate me. He wouldn't hate me? Well, you must allow me to have my own opinion about that. We may leave it undecided just now. I want you to listen for a minute. When I was a boy I worked hard at school—fagged day after day when I had much rather have taken it easy as the others did—because I had a foolish notion that he would be pleased if I got on well—that it would make him proud of me. I suppose it all sounds rather weak, but I had a sort of adoration for him in those days. I never told anybody, but I believe poor old Haldane knew it somehow. I would have died to please him. I soon saw I had failed. He did not care two straws about school-prizes. Why should he? he had been a soldier all his life; but he tried to pretend he thought it very fine. However, he was rather pleased when I began to shoot well—(how odd it all seems to look back upon)—and as soon as I saw that, I was in a perfect fever to beat Ronald. I could not tell any one in the world but you—(I could not speak of it even to you, Marion, but that it is all over, and it does not matter what a miserable, weak fool I was then)—how I used to lie awake with my heart beating on the chance of a word of praise from him, or how afraid I was of him. Boys are not supposed to mind hard words, are they? But I did.

"Well, then came the time when old Haldane, meaning to serve me, or rather to shield my father from distress, smashed all my life to pieces. If I had spoken then—What did you say? Did you say you wished I had?"

"It is useless to wish that now," faintly said Marion.

"Just so. And no one knows as you do why I could not speak. You knew too why, a little later, I gave up everything in the world I cared

for, to go into the army. You knew I had no liking for soldiering. Whatever ambition I had was in quite another direction; but I felt you would understand,—and I think he was pleased, Marion. He never said it in so many words, but I believe he liked it; didn't he?"

"Yes."

"You were with him and saw it pleased him? In common charity you may tell me that, for it is not so very much satisfaction I have got out of giving up my own life."

"He was very, very glad."

"I thank you." He stopped for a moment or two. "You had thought hard thoughts of me even then, Marion. Perhaps I wanted to prove to you and to myself that I was not the coward you believed I was. And now," he went on quickly, "since this Crimean business—Marion! if you had seen my father's face when I came home,—if you knew what it was to have him as he is! Oh," he broke off, "I can't speak of it!—but don't ask me to break his heart just now."

"Miss Montrose wishes to know," interrupted the voice of Agénor de Beaurepaire, "if you will dine with her this evening; and Lady Beatrix is afraid," he added to Marion, "that there is a mist coming up from the river. She sent me to bring you in."

Kenneth and Marion turned directly, the young Frenchman lingering behind for another look at the shipping.

"Kenneth," said Marion, as they walked along the gravel-path, "Uncle Norman is a strong and a just man. I believe he would rather suffer than that a great injustice should be done to Ronald."

"Ronald again!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Ronald be ——"

"I asked Miss Montrose," once more interposed Agénor, and he came beside Marion with a very serious face, "and she thinks I had better go to-night to Lady Mary Beaufort's, and then to Chester House."

"Very well," responded Marion mechanically; and when they reached the house she saw her father and General Douglas standing on the steps.

She could not recover from the miserable impression that her talk with Kenneth had made on her. Perhaps she was hardly calm enough to judge quite fairly of all that he had said, or to perceive how curiously he deceived himself, and by what a strange twisting of the facts he managed to free himself from blame. It was always the unfortunate circumstances brought about by Adam Haldane, that he dwelt upon. He really and sincerely believed that he was as much to be pitied as Ronald, and as much the victim of a deception. Marion dimly saw all that, but she did not dwell on it much. She had been deeply touched by Kenneth's confession of his long love for his father. His words, his voice, his face, had all borne the evidence of a deep sincerity. She had seen how his hand as it rested on the terrace-wall was trembling, and the violent quivering of the muscles round his mouth.

And was there no truth in all that he had said?

She remembered vividly her uncle's suppressed delight when Kenneth elected to follow his father's profession; the ill-concealed pride and the eagerness with which he set about getting the foolish boy his commission.

And then she thought of last winter. She could see the study at Norman's Tower, and the table all strewn with war-maps and plans of Sebastopol.

Early and late the General's white head was bent over those plans, comparing them with the newspaper reports, following the position of that one regiment, and pointing it out with a finger that would tremble despite of all his efforts.

She saw him watching for the newspapers, shutting himself up to be alone when he opened them first, reading them aloud afterwards, with a composure and steadiness that had been won in those solitary hours, trying to spare Granny all the harrowing details of heroic suffering and hardships that pierced his own heart; smiling at Grizel's shuddering wonder how poor dear Kenneth could go through it all so cheerily, and answering her in his old simple formula—"Kenneth is a gentleman."

She recalled the coming of the news of the Alma, later of Inkerman, and the days of waiting until the lists of killed and wounded came out,—those days of quiet, patient, proud, and silent anguish.

Then she saw him kneel and weep when the good tidings came, thanking God humbly that his boy had done his duty.

Was it she—Marion—who had been beside him all that time,—who had watched and waited, wept and prayed with him,—was it she who wished his happiness to be destroyed, his pride to be laid low?

That very evening, as they sat at dinner, she noticed the inward glow that lighted up his face; she heard his voice soften in the old-fashioned, "A glass of wine with you, my dear boy," that he addressed to his son. And her ear caught the satisfaction in his tone as some military question was referred to him, and he answered carelessly, "Don't ask an old campaigner like me; I suppose the young soldier here can tell us all about their new-fangled ways."

Kenneth, as if he read Marion's thought, turned his eyes appealingly towards her.

It was a new, keen pain. For the first time a doubt, a perplexity came over her. For the first time Kenneth's duty did not seem so clear, his path so plainly marked; for the first time false lights and conflicting duties dazzled her sight. Poor Marion!

Oh, if Kenneth might be silent, if his father might be spared!—if she herself could in some unknown way put right, by the sacrifice of her whole life, the wrong that had been done!

On one side stood her uncle and Kenneth; on the other, in stern array, Truth and Justice,—Ronald and Lady Douglas.

When Kenneth was gone, and Agénor, painstaking and conscientious, had started off to his first party, Marion went down again on to the terrace in the moonlight. The airy chimes from St. Margaret's Church came along the river from Westminster, and then sounded the deep booming of Big Ben's great voice. She hid her face upon her hands and bowed herself down on to the wall, feeling as if her life was being rent in two.

She had almost ceased to blame Kenneth. It is not easy to blame the person whose voice stirs your heart as no other voice can, and whom you can only look at through the golden mists of childish memory.

He was to her like one under the power of an evil enchantment—unhappy, struggling, repentant, yet nearly powerless to get free. And the work that was given her was to try and release him. By patience, by prayer, by self-forgetfulness, and by courage. Her heart rose to meet the task. The only hard part was that long waiting in the dark, until something she could attempt should be placed

in her way. To release Kenneth, or else in some way to atone for the suffering he had caused—the first was her hope, the second would be her consolation if better things should fail.

Life was opening and spreading itself out before her in grave, dark colours. How many years older she felt than that young Agénor de Beaurepaire, with his evening parties and his serious earnestness about trifles. In her ignorance Marion even believed that she felt older than the elderly people who were talking so peacefully in the lighted room she had just left, with no secrets to weigh them down, or conflicting duties to perplex them. How little she knew of their past—of the battles, the wounds, the defeats and victories, that all belonged now to the time which is gone!

Youth, and the present—these are the great realities. And then for a moment it seemed to her almost hard that the careless joyousness that belonged to her age should be denied her. Other girls whom she had seen last night looked so free and happy. Why must she fight, and be lonely? The consciousness of solitude, never so oppressive as in a great city, weighed on her; all the more because of the thrill and excitement of a life that she felt was all round her, but did not touch her. She had no part in it all. The roar of the carriage-wheels seemed full of stir and purpose. Distant lights sparkled from the bridges, and along the river far-off music rose and fell with fitful gaiety—a murmuring hum of voices was in the air. Was everybody joyous and busy except herself?

Presently the clocks struck again at Westminster. To Marion's ears it appeared as if two voices spoke to her in them. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may," rang out from the sweet silvery chimes. "How

noiseless falls the foot of time, that only treads on flowers."

Then the mighty hammer clashed down. "Life is solemn: hours are precious: they are passing."

The chimes were for such as Agénor, the warning voice for her.

It happened that she scarcely saw Kenneth again before she returned to the Highlands, but she knew that he was coming to stay with his father as soon as he could get leave. Dalbraith seemed wonderfully quiet when they reached it. Sir Charles Stuart was gone abroad. General Douglas had come back before Lady Beatrix on account of the illness of his old servant, Adam Haldane. One of the first things Marion heard at home was, that old Adam was dying.

She had always been rather afraid of him; and since the time that Kenneth had shared his secret with her, the old soldier had taken her in aversion, and was perpetually trying to frighten her by snarling, and scowling at her under his red eye-brows. But now Marion asked to go and see him. Was not this something that she could do? Might not Adam be persuaded before he died to tell the true story of Lord Douglas's death? She must be brave, and forget the shrinking she had always felt from him.

"Miss Marion has come to see you, Adam," said the General, as he took her into the room.

"Aye," responded a voice that was changed, broken, fallen, and quite strange to Marion.

And it was a very old face that lay upon the pillow,—rough and unshaven, the mouth fallen in, the small restless eyes dim, but still moving about quickly. Marion came up trembling to take his hand. He did not move it towards her. It felt rigid, bony, and cramped when she put hers upon it,

"Poor Adam!" she said gently, "you are very ill!"

"Aye," repeated the deep voice again, and his breath laboured; "vera ill."

General Douglas patted the old man's shoulder kindly, and the restless eyes fixed themselves on his face.

"Miss Marion is going to stay with you for a little while, old friend," he said. "I shall not be long away."

"Aye."

He pointed Marion to a seat, and went quietly out of the room. It was what she had hoped for, and yet she felt strangely helpless, left alone with this weird-looking, old, dying man.

He took no heed of her, only groaned now and then; and when he opened his eyes let them stray aimlessly about the room.

Marion clasped her hands and waited. It seemed to her cruel to bring the troubles and wrong-doing of the past back to one who lay exhausted on the threshold of another life. Would it not be pardonable and right to speak only pleasant words of peace and hope in the dying ears? Would it not be more fitting to take up that Bible which her uncle had left half-open beside the bed, and to read of rest for the heavy-laden?

She stretched out her hand to take the book, but as she touched it, some of its real spirit seemed to pass into her heart. Repentance—truth—confession,—were not these its teachings? Should she dare to speak of peace where no peace ought to be? Marion lifted the book on to her knee, and held it there to give herself courage, but she did not open it.

"Adam," she said presently, leaning forward and speaking in a clear voice, "you remember me, don't you?"

"Aye," he said once again; "it's Miss Merryan. I mind ye fine."

"And Kenneth?" asked Marion.

"Kenneth!" he repeated, "Kenneth!—the bairns were aye together."

"You loved Kenneth?" persisted Marion.

"Weel eneuch, well eneuch," answered the old man.

"I saw Kenneth the other day. He is not happy, Adam. There is something you can do for him."

Adam turned his eyes on her with a look that, apathetic as it was, had in it a gleam of suspicion.

"I canna be fashed," he said presently.

"It would not trouble you much. I know you would be glad to serve him if you could, for his father's sake."

No answer.

"Would you not, Adam?" she repeated gently.

"I dinna ken what ye will be speiring for," he answered uneasily.

Marion heard a footstep outside the door, and fearing that her uncle might be already coming back, she bent down and whispered hastily, "You and Kenneth have a secret, Adam. Tell it to his father before it is too late."

Once more there was no answer. Marion waited; the footstep outside passed by.

"You heard me, Adam?"

"I wish folks wad let me be," he said at last, querulously. "I've nane sae lang to live—"

"I know, I know!" she interposed. "Oh, Adam, you would not like to die with such a secret!"

"Wha said there wad be a secret?" he asked, with a cunning glance.

"You know Kenneth told it me. Adam, have pity on us all;—for your own sake, for Kenneth's, for poor Lord Douglas—"

"Hae done! hae done!" He sprang up suddenly, raising himself in his bed with a strength she had not believed him to be capable of, and his voice rose to a kind of piping scream: "How dare ye try to scare a dee'in man!" and he shook his bony, trembling fist at her.

Terror seized on Marion. She flew towards the door, then paused; considered, gathered her courage together, and turned back. The poor old dying man, he could not hurt her. She looked at him. He was still sitting up, his grey lips moving convulsively, his face working—a ghastly face, that filled her with a great pity added to her fear.

"Adam, my poor old friend," she said, going back to the bed-side, "I did not mean to make you angry."

He fell back with a deep groan as if exhausted. Trembling, she moistened his lips with a cordial that stood on the table, and waited. Gradually the wandering and apathetic look crept again over his face.

But Marion felt she must speak now, or else for ever hold her peace.

"Adam," she said, "you are soon going to where there are no secrets,—to God, before whom all hearts are open. I charge you to speak before you die, for the sake of those whose lives you have injured, and for the sake of your own soul!"

He listened evidently, for his hand ceased its nervous movement on the bed-clothes.

"What would ye gar me do?" he said at last.

"Oh, Adam, tell Uncle Norman!" answered Marion, falling on her knees.

He looked all round the room, and then his eyes came back to her face. She saw a look of doubt, a gleam of light, then a sudden expression of fear.

He moved his head and sighed. She could not bear to watch the struggle that she thought she read upon his face, and she went away to the open window and looked out, scarcely breathing in her eagerness.

When at last she turned back to the bed-side Adam lay quietly asleep.

But not for a single disappointment would Marion give up the task she had set herself to fulfil. Day after day she went back and faced the apathy, the feeble anger, the fretful weariness with which the old man met her, steeling her heart against her own longing to leave him in peace, and forcing her pleading words on his unwilling ears. She had ceased to expect much, but she went on hoping simply against hope. She did not know that in her earnest wistful face and quiet patience, there was something that helped her cause better than her words.

One day she had been kneeling beside his bed for a long while, gently chafing his cold hands, and trying to soothe his restlessness, when General Douglas came in.

Adam's eyes always gave a welcome to his master, and they fancied that his mind was clearer when "His honour" was in the room. He looked up now.

"Where'll Master Kenneth be the noo?" he said faintly; "I wad fain see him before I go."

Marion could not repress the start with which she heard the name.

"He is coming here in a few days," her uncle answered; "but I can write to-day and bid him hasten as much as he possibly can. The post has not gone yet."

"Aye."

The General went away to write. Adam closed his eyes with a groan.

"Dear Adam," said Marion, gently, "Kenneth will come to you, I know."

She was trembling from head to foot, but she tried to steady her voice, and the hands that still held his chill, stiff fingers. He drew them away with a peevish look of vexation. "Let me be," he said impatiently.

But when Marion prepared to steal away, leaving him to the nurse who had come in, he feebly beckoned her back.

"Miss Merryan," he whispered hoarsely, "gin our Kenneth does na gi'e me leave, I will na speak ae word. I ha'e gi'en my promise till him."

"Yes, yes; but he will, Adam; he will."

"I am no that sure," answered Adam, with a gleam of his old shrewdness; "I would na undertake to say."

"I know he will."

"Aweel;" but his thoughts were dropping away again, and he fell to muttering below his breath.

General Douglas was sealing a letter when Marion went to him. "The poor old fellow has set his heart on seeing Kenneth again," he said; "but I doubt his lasting so long, myself."

"Oh, Uncle Norman, Kenneth will come in time."

Her uncle shook his head.

"This is Tuesday; you cannot look for him before Friday evening, at earliest."

Marion's heart sank. The strain of suspense was hard to endure for so long; how were those three days to be lived through? Would he come in time? would he be too late?—for ever those two questions. Beyond them she would not suffer her thoughts to stray. All must be well when he was

there; she would not doubt that. Her one passionate wish was that he should come before Adam died. Spoken by those dying lips, the confession would reach General Douglas's ears at a time when it would be easy for him to comfort the passing soul with words of full forgiveness. It would be Adam's confession, not Kenneth's. That which the son for very love found it too hard to say, would be spoken for him. And on him, after the one shock, would fall the mighty blessing. The burden would be lifted from his life.

Those three days passed; the watching and the waiting went on. The old man sank rapidly. At times he was roused to full consciousness; more often his mind wandered far back into the past. He was a soldier again; the names of long-forgotten comrades were on his lips, and old words of command.

Now and then the General, standing by, would start with a sad half-smile, as he recognized some broken fragment of one of the scenes of his youth. Adam was in the Peninsula—he was fighting—and his captain was always in his thoughts. They heard him speak as if in answer to an order, and saw him trying to stiffen himself into a military salute.

Marion used to look on with a feeling that she was cruel in wishing,—nay willing, him to prolong the fight with death. "A little longer," was the cry of her heart; "just a little longer." But would he know Kenneth when he came? They often spoke to him now, and he gave no answer, only rambled on in broken words.

After noon on Friday, however, the sinking powers seemed to rally once again. His voice grew stronger, and he knew all those who came into his room, and

spoke to them. "It is the last flicker of the fading lamp," said General Douglas.

"He will win awa the nicht," whispered the nurse, watching him with experienced eyes.

Kenneth would be here in a few hours.

"You have been very good to my poor old Adam, Marion," her uncle said to her as they were pacing up and down before the Tower. She was watching the lengthening shadows, and she turned with a thrill of remorse.

"Oh, don't say that, Uncle Norman."

"Kenneth ought soon to be here," he continued, taking out his watch; "but he will barely be in time, if he comes at all."

In another hour they were sent for back to the sick-room. A change had come. General Douglas took the old man's hand in his. The minister, Angus Maclean, stood at the foot of the bed. Marion knelt down and prayed that all selfish feeling might be taken from her in that solemn hour. No one spoke; no one moved, till the door was quietly opened, and Marion looked up with a start as a hand was put on her shoulder.

Kenneth stood beside her; he was leaning over the sick man. "My dear old Adam," she heard him say gently; "do you know me?"

There was no smile on Adam's face, but an answering look of full recognition.

Marion rose from her knees, and without looking at Kenneth stole noiselessly out of the room. Her uncle followed her in a minute or two. "He wants to see Kenneth 'his lane,'" he said half-smiling. "Poor faithful old fellow; he always loved that boy."

"Uncle Norman," said Marion abruptly, "I am going home."

Kenneth was alone with the dying man. The thought of what was now passing between them made her heart beat to suffocation. Soon they would summon General Douglas, and as if for the first time Marion realized what this would be to him. Hitherto she had only felt that she was fighting a great battle for the deliverance of Kenneth, and for the cause of truth.

"My child," she heard her uncle saying anxiously, "how pale you look; you have worn yourself out, Marion. You are not fit to walk home. Go and wait in the boat, and I will send some one to row you over."

Marion was beginning to feel strangely weary, and her head swam. She went down, as her uncle told her, to the little boat that was moored near the landing-place, and waited with her face buried in her hands. She hardly knew in the reaction of feeling that was coming over her how the minutes passed. She could not have told whether it was a long or a short time, before she was roused by the sound of footsteps. Kenneth and the General were coming down towards the boat. She saw that they walked slowly, and that the father was leaning on the son's arm.

Marion raised herself to meet them.

"I have left you a long time, my child," her uncle said; "but Kenneth sent for me just after I left you. It is all over, Marion."

"He is dead?" she asked.

He bent his head. "A few minutes ago; very quietly, without a struggle; but I think he knew me to the last.—And now, Marion, Kenneth shall take you home."

Marion tried with her dazzled eyes to read their faces. Kenneth looked disturbed and very pale;

his father, grave and sad. He signed to Kenneth, who got into the boat and pushed off from the shore, without saying a word.

The loch lay golden in the setting sun, and purple shadows fell on the eastern hills. Marion was half-lulled, half-confused, by the smooth, gliding motion through the shining water. She could not speak to Kenneth, but sat gazing straight before her.

When they were fairly out in the loch he stopped rowing, and leant forward so as to look into her face: "Marion," he said gently, "it could not be as you wished."

"As I wished," she repeated, in a dull, mechanical way.

"This was no time for explanations. Poor old Haldane!—I think I set his mind at rest upon it."

"He is dead, and he said nothing; do you mean that?" asked Marion, speaking in a voice so strained and unlike her own that Kenneth was half frightened.

"Both on my father's account and on his own, it would never have done; but I am sorry," he added bitterly, "that you should be disappointed."

Marion made no answer, and he sat with his eyes fixed on his oar, watching the bright drops that ran along its edge and dropped into the water.

"I should like to go home," she said presently; and he obeyed without a word.

When they reached the other side Marion got up from her place, steadied herself as she passed him by the hand which he held out to her, and went silently up the bank.

At that moment Kenneth did not dare to follow her.

CHAPTER XII

GOOD INTENTIONS

" O Marion's a bonnie lass,
And the blyth blinks in her e'e;
And fain wad I marry Marion,
Gin Marion wad marry me."

It was soon after this that Douglas returned to Dalbraith.

Events followed one another rather quickly just then. Adam Haldane's funeral was barely over before General Douglas received that letter from Ronald which made him hurry up to London to meet him.

Kenneth departed with his father, for just now Dalbraith was scarcely a satisfactory place to him; so he went off to join a brother-officer's yacht at Oban, intending to return home for the last bit of his leave, by which time he hoped that Marion would have got over the first bitterness of her disappointment.

As yet she could not bear it to be spoken of; she avoided Kenneth, and went wandering away alone on the hills, or sat looking idly across the loch, while her thoughts went and came like ships upon the sea. The downfall of her hopes left her almost stunned for the time, though her nature was too brave and too healthy to remain long crushed under this ruin of her dreams.

Kenneth would fain have talked it over after his fashion. He wanted to reason with her about it, but

she shrank back. The pain was still too new—her faith in him had suffered shipwreck—she could only keep aloof from him, so he went away.

And then began a new scene in the poor little drama of her life—a new scene that had in it a half-comic element of misunderstandings.

General Douglas came home full of Ronald. He could talk of nothing else; and it was natural that Marion should listen eagerly to everything she could hear about him, since her hopes had ebbed so low that her best comfort was in trying to believe that, after all, the harm done to him was not so great as she had feared.

But the moment he came home she saw that his history was printed on his face, in characters, however, that were rather hard to decipher; for though his expression was very melancholy, it was not with that weak sadness that needs or asks for sympathy.

The frank, impetuous, confiding nature had been taught self-dependence in a harsh school; but, at whatever cost, the lessson had been learnt, and Ronald knew how to live alone. Further than that it was difficult for any one to see. Marion in vain watched for the brightening of his face; it seldom grew soft, and the smile that had in it a curious charm, telling both of strength and sweetness, was seldom seen.

She liked his face best, she thought, when Grizel was making some of her untoward speeches; his downward look at her, with its gleam of amusement, seemed to Marion full of the patient, protecting indulgence that the strong accord the weak.

Ronald often said quaint, half-mocking things —the quaintest and the least serious, Marion found out, when he was most in earnest. But, after all,

how little she knew of him!—a grave reserve—a rare winning smile—a queer trick of speech; these are not very distinctive characteristics. As yet, she knew nothing more.

It was, perhaps, not very strange that General Douglas misunderstood Marion's interest in her cousin. He loved her for it. Any woman might well care for such an one as Ronald. He longed to bless her and thank her; and every time her shy earnest manner confirmed his hopes, he thought her more womanly and sweet. She could scarcely have been the Marion she was—true, and tender, and noble—if the pity she must needs feel for Douglas had not grown in to something that was more than "akin to love."

Poor Marion was utterly unconscious of all her uncle's visions. Too simple and humble to think about herself at all, she was only occupied with hopes and fears for the others; and, as she slowly recovered from the shock she had received, she longed more than ever to be given some work of help, however small, to do.

And so the game of cross-purposes went on very quietly for a time. Then, suddenly, Ronald's manner changed. The kind look and tone that she used to think belonged to Grizel was given to her now—without the amused gleam. He came often to talk with her in his grave and gentle way, and seemed to care about making her tell him her thoughts in return.

Marion was as slow and stupid as possible, poor child, about understanding it all. Ronald's love-making was certainly not of the ordinary type. It seemed to her only natural to be friendly with him, and rather unkind of Uncle Norman to be ready to jump down Grizzy's throat on all occasions.

It was his irrepressible anxiety and restlessness that first enlightened her. Any looker-on must have been amused at his little manœuvres—the eagerness with which he strove to show off his nephew in a good light—his devoted manner to Marion—the atmosphere of stern suspicion with which he surrounded Grizel. Lady Beatrix, who never could resist the funny side of things, tried vainly to look grave; but she, too, was on her good behaviour with the General, and, withal, was very anxious about her granddaughter.

The awakening came to Marion at last—she could scarcely have told by what means General Douglas was so often with Lady Beatrix, and she noticed that their earnest talk ceased abruptly when she came into the room. Then, one day, Ronald came himself; and after he was gone she saw that Granny had been crying. Besides, as he left the house, Ronald met her, and took her hand—and after that she knew.

"Marion," said Lady Beatrix.

They were alone together, and the girl sat on a low stool, her hands clasped over her grandmother's knee. She had been silent for some time; and Lady Beatrix, supposing she guessed her thoughts, had not disturbed her. There was an undefined feeling of tender pity for the child in her heart, though she believed that Marion was lost in happy dreams. Still it seemed to her almost sad to see the great realities of life throw their shadows for the first time across the youth which she fancied had been so entirely free from care.

She would have wondered if she could have read the thoughts that filled Marion's mind, and weighed so heavily on the head that was resting on her grandmother's lap. She stroked the fair hair lovingly.

"My child thinks it all very bright," she said to herself; "but, O! God guard her, for it is the strong light that casts the shadows."

And Marion, in her lofty ignorance, was thinking, "It does not matter if I am very happy or not—happiness is not everything—if only I am ready when the call comes to me."

She could hardly have told if this was joy or sorow, so unlike was it to any of her dreams. It was not thus she had hoped to be of service to Ronald. At first she felt nothing but utter surprise at the thought that she could be anything to him. She could hardly believe it yet; but if it were so, she did not hesitate, nor did she guess why there was a sort of drawing-back in the bottom of her heart. It was in this strange, unlooked-for way that she was to make that atonement for Kenneth's sin to which she had vowed her life.

"My little Moll," said Lady Beatrix, "I am going to make Uncle Norman very angry."

"You, Granny?" Marion woke up with a short laugh of amusement and disbelief.

"Yes; Norman will be angry. He is very strict with us all just now; but I must take care of my child first of all. I will not have her taken by surprise. Marion," she continued, very softly, "there is something coming to you. You have guessed?"

"I wondered what Uncle Norman said to you," said Marion.

"And you guessed?"

"Granny, tell me."

"My little Moll,"—she sunk her voice still lower; "they want you to make poor Ronald happy."

"Does Uncle Norman want it?" whispered Marion back.

"Uncle Norman wants it—and, my darling, so does Ronald."

"Granny," said Marion, in a serious, earnest tone, "are you sure that Ronald does?"

Lady Beatrix laughed a little.

"Granny, you must not laugh. Does Ronald really?"

"Yes, my poor little Moll. Ronald really does."

The colour deepened a little in the girl's cheeks; she sat gravely considering.

"But, Marion," continued her grandmother, "we must think first of what is right."

"Yes, Granny," very earnestly.

"There are stories—true stories, alas!—against poor Ronald. They frighten me for you."

"For me?" Marion looked as if she did not quite understand.

"My child, if you should not be happy or safe with him."

"Oh! is that all?" said Marion.

"Ah! you think that now—you think you cannot help being happy with Ronald—but listen. Things have been very hard on him; he has had a sorrowful life in many ways;"—Marion clasped her hands tightly together—"he has been tempted, and he has failed. Those who are wise and prudent would say he is not to be trusted."

Marion raised her head; the light was coming to her.

"Child, how shall I answer for you to your father?"

"Uncle Norman—" began Marion.

"Uncle Norman can only think of what is good for Ronald," and once more the girl's face brightened.

"You must consider a great deal, Marion, and pray, and try to be very wise; that is why I told

you." Her hand shook as she still stroked her grandchild's hair, and Marion took it in both of hers and kissed it.

"Ronald came to me to-day," resumed Lady Beatrix, presently; "Norman sent him. He was very good, very generous, very patient; he let me say everything I wished. He did not excuse himself; he spoke harshly of no one, and very tenderly of his mother; but—he wants you, Marion."

Marion gave a little sobbing sigh.

"And I know I ought to have been firmer with him, and said more severe things, for he has failed; we must not forget that. But all he said was so touching. Poor dear boy, it made my heart ache to think of that melancholy home, and his poor mother."

"What did you say to him, Granny?"

Granny looked down, and seemed quite ashamed of herself.

"Oh, child! I think—I am afraid—I was so sorry for him. I am afraid I said—almost what you will say."

It was only a few days after this, that General Douglas broke in ruthlessly on poor Grizel's dissertation about Tibbie MacMichael's prospects. When she had been hurried out *nolens volens* to see the sunset, Marion's first impulse was to follow her as quickly as she could, but Ronald had come to her side, and as she tried to rise, he laid his hand heavily on hers.

"Marion," he said, and for the first time since he had been at home there was something in his look and voice that reminded her of the boy Ronald, something that was half fun, half tenderness. "Do you want to hear some more about young Morison?"

"N—no," she answered, doubtfully.

He knelt down on one knee beside her, and his face and tone changed suddenly, as he said, "Then will you listen to me now?"

Out of doors, in the glow of that sunset which the General professed so greatly to admire, the unsuspecting Grizel was telling one of her most effective stories. Norman had artfully beguiled her (without much difficulty, it may be) into beginning it.

True, they both knew it by heart, and had fought tooth and nail many a time, over their separate versions of it, but to-day he manifested a meek, believing spirit, and an unwonted desire for information.

Grizel launched out into new and utterly incredible details. "Very curious indeed," was murmured by her hearer in a tone of profound conviction.

It threw poor Grizel quite out. She stammered, and stopped when she came to the place where the challenge ought to have broken in, lost the thread of her discourse, and finally brought the story to a lame and impotent conclusion.

However, it had served its turn.

Half an hour; only half an hour, and yet how everything had changed for Douglas and Marion! A short time, and but few words spoken, and such very simple ones, but strong words and true.

"You do trust me?" he had asked. "You are not afraid?" And when she answered, "Indeed I trust you," he held out his hand, and clasped hers with a strong close grasp. "Thank you; God helping me," he said, "I believe you may."

And then he added simply, "It is tremendously good of you, Marion. It makes me so very happy."

It was Grizel, of course, who came blundering in on them first, with a summons to Marion to come out and see the "bonnie golden clouds," but it must be confessed that the General was not far behind

her, and that he was eager—under the cover of Grizel's indiscretion—to satisfy the curiosity he could no longer conveniently resist.

The two were standing together in the window, and both said "Granny," and came quickly forward to meet Lady Beatrix.

Grizel subsided against the wall, simply breathless with amazement, and only just able to gasp out, "Preserve us all!—and I who saw it from the first!"

The little room with the prim pictures looking down seemed in a moment to be filled to overflowing with rejoicing. "Euphemia Douglas, spinster, ætat 45," would have been edified by the ceremonious "salute" of congratulation and sympathy that was exchanged forthwith, between Cousin Norman and Cousin Grizel. And then they stood quietly aside, while Granny, with the air of old-world dignity that she knew so well how to assume, signed to the young pair to kneel before her, and standing very erect like the little patriarch she was, she laid one hand on the fair head, the other on the dark, and bade God "bless the bairns."

The next day Ronald took Marion to his mother. There was no formal, loving little ceremony at Dalbraith. Lady Douglas asked to see the girl alone, so her son only went with his betrothed as far as the door of the room, which she entered by herself. There was something rather sad in leaving him outside; but Margaret was very kind. She kissed and welcomed her future daughter, and then she held Marion's hand and stood silently looking at her with those large dark eyes, that had never lost their steady intensity of gaze. "I am glad you love him, Marion," she said. "It is the best thing in all the world for him."

Marion was tremulous with shyness, and with the longing she did not know how to express, that she might be allowed to be something to Ronald's mother. But while she was trying to find words Lady Douglas turned quietly away, and opened the drawer of a cabinet near her. She presently came back to Marion with a quaint old jewel in her hand, that was fashioned like a heart, and attached to a curiously-wrought gold chain. "It is very old," she said, "and they say it belonged once to Queen Mary. My husband gave it to me before I was married, and now I think he would like it to belong to you;" and she fastened it round the girl's throat.

It was a curious old jewel certainly, and the act was a gracious one, but somehow it checked Marion's words, and brought the tears into her eyes. She could only say "Thank you," and kiss the hand that clasped the chain round her neck. "And now go back to Douglas," said Margaret, gently pushing her towards the door.

Ronald was leaning against the wall, waiting for her, and he started from rather a despondent attitude to come and meet her.

They went and stood in the window, both silent, till he said with a wistful sort of smile, "I am sure mother was glad."

"Oh, I hope so, I think so," answered Marion.

He hesitated a moment, and then added, "She did not ask for me, I suppose?"

"No," Marion was obliged to say; and she put her hand on his arm.

He moved his head with a quick, slight gesture, that she did not know how to interpret, and then he asked her to go out with him.

Lady Beatrix had laid only one condition upon Douglas, and that was, that the marriage was not to

be announced to any one until Marion's father came himself, to confirm the consent she had given.

Nobody minded this, except that Grizel mourned over the letter she should not now be able to write to Dullsmuir, imparting the great news. It would have been so gratifying to all there, and 'dear Jane' had written off to her the moment she perceived anything 'particular' in Archibald Morison's manner. However, it was not to be. Margaret's brother, Lord Sandysmere, was to be told of course, when he came to Dalbraith, but no one else, "excepting Kenneth," as General Douglas said, patting Marion's hand.

For the last year or two the Dalbraith forest and moors had been taken by Lord Sandysmere, to the satisfaction of gillies and foresters, who felt that the old place had at least, in some sort, fallen back into the hands of the family.

It was a good thing too, for Margaret, to have her brother with her, for though his headquarters were at the shooting-lodge in the hills up north, he passed a good deal of his time at Dalbraith. His influence over his sister had been very strong at one time, and his affection for her was unfailing.

Lord Sandysmere was one of those people who are greatly beloved by their families, and by their own chosen circle of intimate friends, and are entirely different in their behaviour to them and to every one outside. To his own belongings he was affectionate, kindly, keenly interested in all that concerned them, and though rather critical, generally indulgent in his judgment. To the world at large he was sarcastic, indifferent, and quietly unapproachable.

Much had been expected of him in his youth. People said he was quite certain to distinguish himself, but time slipped on, and the predictions were

not verified. Perhaps he did not care much for success; perhaps he had never found any object that he thought worth fighting for.

Margaret possessed more of his confidence than anyone in the world, and in a good-humoured off-hand way of his own, he often astonished her by home truths about herself, that no one else would have dreamt of telling her.

"Yes," he said to her one day; "there has been a screw loose somewhere in both your life and mine. They have both of them been failures more or less."

"There was a part of mine," she said in a low voice, "that no one could have called a failure."

"I wasn't questioning whether we had been happy or not. I only said that from different causes, you and I have wasted our lives."

"Have you wasted yours, Harold?"

"To be sure I have. Can you ask? I have let mine drift. I did not come to any great crash, but I let the chances slip by, one by one. You don't suppose my life now is what I meant it to be, do you?"

"I have wondered sometimes why you did not do more."

"Simply because I am lazy and ignorant, my dear," he said. "It's no good going back upon it, but no one knows better than I do why I failed. I waited a little too long, that was all."

"One may try," she said, "and fail."

"I don't call it failing if you have done your best; but then, you see, I never have done my best. No more have you, Meg."

His sister opened her eyes, and stared at him as if thunderstruck. "Harold!"

He laughed, and patted her shoulder. "My poor dear, after all, you have always been a spoilt child."

Once again she looked at him. "I think you must be going out of your mind," she said deliberately.

"No; I really mean it. Look at your son, Margaret. I don't say he is not a very fine fellow, but do you think you have made him all that nature intended him to be?"

Lord Sandysmere did not wait for an answer, nor did Margaret try to give him one. He leant back in his arm-chair, and buried himself in the *Times*, quite unconscious of the odd effect his words produced on one who was only used to the chivalrous compassion of Norman Douglas, and to Grizel's unquestioning adoration.

He liked sunshine, and was fond of seeing happy faces round him, and he never ceased regretting the old light-hearted frankness that used to make Ronald such good company when he was a boy. He could hardly forgive his sister for letting her own gloom throw a shadow over her son's whole life.

"It is not right," he used to say impatiently. "We were not meant to be for ever looking back. Why don't you share his interests more?"

"Douglas has got Marion," Lady Douglas once answered; "he does not need me now."

"That is the most womanly, motherly, jealous, natural speech I ever heard you make, Meg; I shall begin to have some hopes of you." But Margaret shook her head.

Douglas and Marion were too grave a pair of lovers to please Lord Sandysmere. It was the only fault he had to find with them. He delighted in Marion's hardy Highland ways, and in her strength and fearlessness.

Sometimes he made her walk for miles with him when he was shooting on the moors, and then he used to explain to her what a pity it was that she and

Ronald took life so seriously. Marion listened and smiled. She could not tell him half the reasons that made life seem to her a very serious thing. No one knew as well as she did what had made it so for Ronald, and the more she learnt of his strong and loyal nature, of his generous patience, and the entire child-like trust he had given to herself, the more Marion looked upon his love as a solemn charge that had been given to her to keep.

One day she walked up the glen with Lady Douglas to the water-fall. Ronald and his uncle had gone off for a week on a fishing expedition, and they were alone. Margaret was fond of the falls, especially when they had been swollen by heavier rains than usual, and just now, after many wet days, they were at the acme of their turbulent glory. She sat down on a rock at the foot of the craigs, and gazed silently before her, quite indifferent to the cloud of spray, that a fitful puff of air blew over her now and then.

It was a sight that fascinated her. Above the steady onward rush of the narrowing river, through the cleft over which the cliffs bent on either side as if watching for its fall; the wild leap where the rocks broke suddenly away; the downward flash, and then the crashing tumble into the basin that seethed and boiled beneath; the shivered waves; the tossed wreaths of foam; sheets of water like whirling snow-storms; straight, falling lines of black, brown, green water, dashed down on to the rocks; rainbow showers blown against the trees; ferns glistening with water-sparks; the loud voices of the thundering waters—and yet with it all a grand monotony. For ever the same rush and fall and roar, the same trembling of the heath-bells on the shaken bank.

Marion left Lady Douglas to watch the falls undisturbed, and wandered further down the glen. It was a quiet evening, grey and soft, that was set like a pearl among the diamonds of the summer. Presently she saw that a man was coming up rapidly from below, in and out among the trees, and across the burn. He was hidden from her for a time by the shoulder of the hill, but she had already recognised Kenneth. Marion knew that his father was expecting him that day, and she was not much surprised at seeing him. Kenneth would scarcely be at home for long, without hearing from some of them of her engagement to Ronald, and she felt sure that his first impulse would be to come to her. All the afternoon the thought of seeing him had been before her. Now she went a few steps to meet him, and then stopped under the shadow of a great lichen-covered rock, one side of which was all blackened and polished by the chafing of the stream. It rose between her and Lady Douglas, so that Kenneth thought at first that Marion was alone.

She said, "Kenneth," and held out her hand as he came up, and he spoke also, but both their voices were drowned by the thunder of the falls. He signed to her to go with him, and still grasping her hand drew her away from the hurly-burly of sound. As soon as they had got far enough away to hear each other speak, he dropped her hand, and said roughly, "Is this true which I have heard?"

"Who told you?" asked Marion, with an instinctive wish to delay her answer.

"What does it matter who told me? Why, all of them. It was the first thing I heard; but it isn't true, is it? I didn't believe it, Marion."

She did not speak.

"It isn't true?" he said again. "It can't be true

that you have promised to marry Ronald? I wish you would answer. You have?—Marion, was that your revenge?"

"Revenge?"

"Revenge—because I could not do as you wished the other day. Was it for that?"

"Kenneth, you do not know what you are saying."

"Yes, yes, I do; and you know as well as I do what I mean. So this is to be the end! Ronald!—what does Ronald care for you, or you for Ronald?"

Marion turned round and faced him, looking up at him with eyes that forced him to meet hers in return.

"Kenneth," she said quietly, "you know best—do we owe nothing to Ronald, you and I? Is it for us to deny him anything he asks?"

He took a sudden step backwards. "Good heavens!" he said, in a low, changed voice, "have you done it for that?"

Every one of Kenneth's moods came upon Marion unexpectedly. When she hoped that he would yield, he was as hard as adamant; but when she looked for a burst of anger, he was gentle and reasonable. He stood still now, looking on the ground, his face full of intense thought, as if for the first time the full understanding of some truth had burst upon him.

"Have you thought of it as seriously as that?" he said at last. "I never quite understood it before. Marion, must you atone with such a price as that?" His tone was one of awe-struck and quiet wonder.

"I do not understand what you mean well enough to answer you," she said; "I only know that when I see what Ronald's life has been, it seems to me that nothing in all the world that I can do, will ever be enough to make up to him for what he has gone through. He thinks I can make his life happier. I

pray God to give me such grace and such love as to fulfil his hope, and to be worthy of his trust and of his love for me."

The colour rushed into her cheeks; she raised her eyes; a look of intense longing, sweetness, and tenderness lit up all her face. There is a theory (perhaps it is a very fanciful one), that rare moments come in every life when the Divine Spirit reigns in the soul with such supremacy, that the face wears that heavenly look which shall belong to it hereafter, and appears for a brief lightning space as it will shine when this mortal shall have put on immortality. Such a look was on Marion's face now.

For the moment—only for the moment—the fire of her enthusiasm caught the smouldering embers of that higher nature that Kenneth had done much to extinguish. He looked up at Marion standing straight and resolute under the huge rock, a grey plaid wound round her slight figure, her hand resting on the rough head which the big deer-hound Lufra had thrust under it. His wise, patient face gazing gravely at the young man, had almost caught the shadow of his mistress's steadfast look. She seemed to draw Kenneth up into some higher region.

"I see," he said in a low voice, "you are right, Marion." And at that moment Lady Douglas came slowly forward from behind the rock which had hidden her from them hitherto. It so chanced that Kenneth had never seen her since her husband's death. It had been partly accident, partly design on his part, that had kept him out of her way during his late visits to Dalbraith. He had always dreaded seeing her, and his last memory of her was in the full tide of her happiness.

Now he looked at this tall, black-robed woman almost as at a stranger, with her quenched beauty,

her sunken eyes and grey hair, her still, set face. He thought it would have been almost less dreadful if she had shown any emotion at seeing him, but it was nothing to her. She had even forgotten how long it was since they last met, and she held out her hand with a smile—that smile which people said was the saddest thing about her.

Marion saw how moved and struck he was, as he silently took her hand, but Lady Douglas did not notice it.

Kenneth had his own creed—a very wild and erratic one, it is true—of generosity and honour. He tried to keep to it, but its rules were vague—the trumpet to which he hearkened gave out an uncertain sound. By this standard he now perceived that he had no right to come between Douglas and Marion. He had—innocently as he had really brought himself to believe—done his cousin a grievous injury. He could atone, and more than atone now, by leaving to him the wife whom he had chosen.

As, on the night of his return, he paced up and down under the windows of the tower, on the little terrace that rose out of the loch, he tried to reason out the question calmly, and to do battle with the fierce longing he felt to go and claim Marion before them all; to summon her away from Ronald, and take possession of the first place in her heart, which belonged to him of right—which had been his since they were children.

What was Ronald to her then?—what ties bound those two together? Marion had belonged to him ever since her father sent her home as a tiny child from India. He never doubted that she loved him. He loved her with all the strength that a selfish man can put into his love; but, perhaps,

he had never cared for her so passionately as now that another man had stepped in and won her away from him.

Until lately his affection had been a part of himself indeed, but a part so long established and so deeply rooted that he did not give very much thought to its existence. Before he met Marion in London, he thought of her as a piece of property of his own, sweet and precious, it is true, but that would wait until it suited him to go and take possession of it.

There was nothing in the world half so near and dear to him; but for a time other interests had been very absorbing, and besides, the image of Marion was mixed up with a bit of his history which he did not like to be reminded of. He had even felt a little unwillingness to face her, and some fear of what she would say to him.

Their meeting in London startled him wonderfully. Marion, in her young, strong, fair womanliness, was not the child who used to see only through his eyes. This new Marion had thought, judged, decided for herself. She met him with a grave composure, and seemed to hold herself apart from him. And then—perhaps to one of Kenneth's nature that was the finishing-stroke—others seemed to value and admire her.

To do him justice, however, jealousy did not count for much. He fell honestly and deeply in love directly he saw the dear, well-remembered face again. That night he went home full of pain, and aching disappointment, and wounded love—and when he saw Marion again next day the feeling only deepened. His old half-brotherly, half-patronising affection was gone for ever—and instead there had risen in his heart a deep, restless, passionate love.

And now he was to give her up—to stand tamely by and see Ronald take the place which he felt belonged to him—Ronald whom he had injured, and therefore did not love.

It was fearfully hard. Would the day ever come when Marion would care most for that other man in whose cause she spoke so eagerly to-day? Kenneth crushed his heel down on the gravel savagely. He looked across the loch, slumbering in the arms of the encircling hills, and hated it for its peacefulness, for the perfect calm that was only broken now and again by a soft breath of air, beneath which it rose and sunk with the gentle breathing of a child asleep.

He thought suddenly of the same scene in autumn, all brown and sere, with black rain lashing the cold water, and blasts laden with hail rushing down every gully in the rocks, to howl in gusts among the tossing trees. To-night only a hushed murmur passed through the branches of the firs. There was absolutely no sound of human life, but somewhere beyond the hills, a long way up the glen, a sheep-dog barked.

The distant melancholy bark brought the thought of Lufra before Kenneth; and with that, a vivid picture, almost a vision, of Marion standing near him in the moonlight, with her grey dress and shining eyes.

Lady Beatrix, and Marion, and Grizel were together at the Lady's Lodge next day, when Kenneth came to see them with his father. Marion had been afraid to see him again after their stormy meeting and silent parting yesterday. She was sorry for him, and with the singular quick sympathy that there had always been between them, she knew

exactly how he shrank from his father's cheery manner and Grizel's effusive greetings.

"For we got but half a sight of you yesterday, Granny and I. He wasn't to hold or to bind, General, after he had gotten the great news, but was off to give Marion joy. Were you greatly surprised, Kenneth, when you heard it? I was —but to be sure they tell me I havn't the gift to see what will be going on under my very nose. Still, I might have known better," she added mysteriously—"there were signs," and she nodded her head.

"Aye, signs; were there, Grizel?" asked the General in a patronising way.

"There were some as saw Marion standing at his left hand that very day—and we all know what that betokens—and other circumstances which we will not enter into now, for it is well-known that the General is no true Highlander in regard to the second sight and the like," ended Grizel, with great dignity.

"I don't know that," said the General, greatly flattered at being supposed to be above all "worn-out superstition and nonsense," "I don't know that, my good friend."

"Ah, well; those that know most say least," continued Grizel, who was beginning to mount her hobby—"but it was no later back than just a month before the late dear Lord came by his death, that old Niel M'Dougall saw him with his own eyes—and his shroud"—

"Cousin Grizel, don't," interrupted Marion.

"Then I won't, my dear; and it wasn't becoming, indeed to talk of such like things and of your troth-plight in one and the same breath. We'll just shift the conversation to some subject that will be

more diverting—this fearsome war in the Crimea, and Kenneth getting his wound in the trenches. Will ye have to go back, Kenneth, to Sebastopol?"

"I hope so, if the war does not come to an end," said Kenneth, smiling.

"There is a conundrum I had in my mind to ask both you and Ronald. You were aye fond of riddles when you were a laddie, Kenneth, do you mind? and very quick at finding them out. I never could think on the answer to one in all my life, though I am very partial to them too. Dear, dear, what was this one? I got it off by heart, and very comical it was. My patience! it was concerning a bit of news and a big gun—that's what made me think of it for you—a bit of news first, as it might be this about Douglas and Marion—and a big gun—'a great discharge;' no that wouldn't be it—or a false report—but that won't do either, because it was no false report, was it, Kenneth, about dear Marion?"

"It seems not," said Kenneth gravely.

"And hasn't our Marion grown up good and bonnie, Kenneth—worthy even of Ronald? You must have wondered to see her grown so tall and fair, and her figure so jimp and small, and her sweet smile. You know they call her the Lily of Dalbraith."

"I do not wonder," answered Kenneth. He was very quiet to-day, courteous and kind to Grizel, and specially loving to Lady Beatrix.

By-and-by, when he had an opportunity of being alone with Marion, he came up to her and took her hand. "Marion," he said gently—"would you like me to go away?"

"From Dalbraith, Kenneth? no!" she answered quickly, the tears coming into her eyes.

"I understand better now what you are doing," he went on; "and I should like to help you, dear, if I could."

"Then stay, Kenneth, and be my brother, as you were in the dear old days."

"Ah," he said with a half-smile, "but the old days are 'lang syne,' Marion."

She looked up at him standing there with a sad look in his beautiful hazel eyes, and she could not but recall the "yellow-haired laddie" whom she had loved so dearly, and whose scrapes and secrets she had shared with so much enthusiasm. There in the old place, just as when they were children, and now he was asking her if he ought to go away!

Truly there are knots fastened in childhood that are very hard to loose—sometimes they cannot be untied, but must be broken, and other things are broken too along with them.

CHAPTER XIII

"AUF WIEDERSEHEN"

"But had I wist, before I kiss'd,
That love had been so hard to win,
I'd lock'd my heart in a case o' gold,
And pinn'd it wi' a siller pin."

An English lane,—warm, sunny, and turf-bordered, and with its hawthorn hedges in full bloom.

A Sunday afternoon in spring—late spring—real spring—when the gorse is a golden glory, and the east wind of many past weeks but a bitter memory.

Two or three children in the grassy lane—some dogs—great horse-chestnut trees peeping over a mossy park-paling, and filling the air with the fragrance of their pink and white plumes of blossom—a bank, starred sparsely with late primroses. Drawn up at the side of the lane, with one wheel almost over among the daffodils and blue-bells in the ditch, is a garden-chair, dragged by a donkey, whose nose is just now buried in a milk-white hawthorn tree with trailing branches, too pure and dainty surely for a donkey's dinner. Lady Beatrix Stuart, as she sits in her little chariot, is so surrounded by heaped-up boughs of broom and May-flower, chestnut-blossom and lilac, that they call her the Queen of the May.

There has been a party at Sandysmere for Easter, but the guests have nearly all departed now. Those

who remain for one more country Sunday have met in the lane this afternoon, some on their way home from church—others gathering spring-spoils by bunches and armsful, for just now trees and hedges are not trees and hedges only, but piles of blossom.

Lord Sandysmere is distracting the donkey's mind from his blackthorn by tempting young bramble-shoots. Kenneth Douglas leans against the wheel, and absently pulls the unopened buds off a dog-rose-bush in the hedge. Agénor de Beaurepaire is pensively gathering forget-me-nots. General Douglas with his hat held in his hand stands at a gate and looks into the park, up the shining green aisle of a great avenue; a little way behind the rest Douglas and Marion are slowly coming over the grass under the white shadow of the hawthorn-hedge.

Presently from the far end of the lane appear another couple, trudging along on opposite sides of the road—a young man and a girl, both in their Sunday best, and bearing nosegays of cowslips—silent and apart, but evidently on the best of terms. The girl looks stolidly before her as she drops a curtsey to the party round the garden-chair, her escort blushes, and responds with gruff bashfulness to the universal "Good evening."

"Lovers' Lane," says Lord Sandysmere to Kenneth, as the two couples pass and greet each other. Kenneth does not answer, but goes to the donkey's head, and rouses poor Jack rather roughly out of his dream of drowsy bliss and brambles.

And so the little cavalcade moved on. Sir Charles Stuart, who had been telling stories to the children, Lord Sandysmere's nieces, came back and walked beside his mother, holding the hand which she held out to him. He was always affectionate and

even demonstrative in his manner to her, though to every one else he was the cheeriest and the least sentimental of human beings. Now too, the shadow of a coming parting was between them, for a few weeks ago he had received his appointment somewhat earlier than he expected, to a high military command in India. It was to see the last of him that Lady Beatrix and Marion were again in England.

His mother possessed the one soft spot in his heart, the rest of it perhaps had grown a little hard during his homeless foreign life, but he was a very good-natured man, cautious and prudent, hard to influence, and tolerably confident in the superiority of his own judgment. This had been abundantly proved to all his belongings, when he came to Dalbraith after the betrothal of Ronald and his daughter. His consent had been waited for, but that he should give it unconditionally, was considered a simple matter of certainty.

He came—heard the story from his mother, who tried to tell it, gambling debts and all, with laboured impartiality, talked things over with General Douglas, and took a long walk over the moors with the young man himself, after which he announced to the dismay of all concerned, that he would sanction no formal engagement till after a year's probation.

He bore himself with unfailing good humour and patience through the storm of entreaties, and remonstrances, and reproaches that assailed him on all sides; the ground he took up was very simple. He was Marion's father and was bound to do what he thought best for her.

No other view of the case in any way concerned him. He liked Douglas much, and was sorry for

him, and he would probably make an excellent husband, but it was better to run no risks. The young man must pay the penalty of his own folly, and if his love would not stand the test of a year's waiting, why it was not love that was worth much.

"But to marry early would be the saving of Ronald," remonstrated General Douglas, to whom that fact seemed the conclusion of the whole matter.

"That may be," responded his imperturbable cousin; "but I am Marion's father, not his."

"You don't put yourself in my poor boy's place, Charley," said the uncle.

"On the contrary, I try to put myself into my girl's, as well as I can," replied the father.

"Ronald will just go to his ruin."

"Then what an escape for Marion!"

"You only attempt to see one side."

"Just that. Don't let us quarrel, Norman. I think young Douglas seems a fine fellow—"

"Only you don't choose to hold out your hand to save him."

"It is my business to save Marion."

"Nonsense; the child would be safe with him"—and the General stopped with a swelling heart.

"A year hence we will hope she may."

"Ah, Charley, you don't know what that young fellow's life has been."

"I have seen a good deal of young fellows' lives in my time, my dear Norman, and so have you, only this one has got on your blind side."

"I know what he is. I know him for a true and honourable gentleman. I trust him as I would myself."

"But you think being on his trial for a twelve-month will be the ruin of him. Come, Norman, I think better of him than you do. He shall have

Marion in another year if he behaves himself. I cannot speak more fairly than that?"

"You can not prevent their feeling pledged to one another."

"I can't help their feelings, but I can break their pledges if it is necessary."

General Douglas walked away—all this was very bitter to him. He scorned to plead for Ronald any further—his very urgency was twisted into a confession of weakness, and what power had he to bring before his cousin's practical mind the intensity of his own hopes and fears. It was hard on Ronald that the home happiness he so much needed had been placed within his reach only to be snatched away again, by what seemed to him a dogged, unreasonable, needless opposition. All this galled the proud old uncle; and then—he was not much used to having his will so strongly overruled, and he did not relish it.

Other people fared no better than he did. Sir Charles argued the case good-humouredly with Grizel, silenced Granny by kissing her hand, and begging her not to give him the pain of refusing a request of hers, and when Lady Douglas came to him herself to plead her son's cause, he treated her as a fond, blind mother who would as a matter of course try to get the moon for her boy if he cried for it.

"After all it is not worth talking of," he said. "What is a year? It will be over before the young people have time to look about them."

Neither Douglas nor Marion thought so.

"Father, if you could change your mind," said Marion, standing before him with downcast eyes and cheeks that were crimsoned with earnestness.

"I can't do that, lassie; but I will listen to anything you want to say."

The words were encouraging, the tone showed no symptoms of wavering—and after all what was it she wished to tell him? How could she express to this father, who was also nearly a stranger, the doubts that she was only dimly conscious of herself —or explain how she dreaded the prolonging of this struggle for another year, and her craving for the calmness that comes with certainty.

"It would be better for Ronald," she said in a low voice.

"Granted—and how about yourself?"

Marion hesitated—she could never speak anything but the truth. "Father," she said, "I am afraid—and tired."

"Tired?" he echoed quickly—"and afraid! Why and wherefore? Tell me; I sometimes think we have not got to the bottom of all this."

"Ronald trusts me too much!" she answered. "I am afraid of not being half as good and strong as he thinks I am. A year seems so very long to wait, before I can be sure he will not be disappointed in me."

Her father patted her cheek with a look of relief. "Is that all? I began to think I had better break off the marriage altogether, if you were frightened and tired of it already."

"Oh father!" exclaimed Marion in a panic. This last threat silenced her altogether, though she was not sure that she had spoken "the whole truth" in trying to speak "nothing but the truth."

There was no one to whom she ought to tell all that was in her mind—no one who would understand how the very depth of Ronald's trust and reverence for her, made her tremble. She saw that he clung to her as if she was his one hope against himself—the anchor that alone could hold him

safe—the spell to soothe the stormy restlessness which it needed all the force of his will to keep down. Was she sufficient for these things?—she who knew herself to be so much weaker than other people thought her.

Ronald himself accepted his probation in silence, with proud acquiescence in its justice, and with a grave patience.

"It is so much the worse for me, Marion, but"—and he took her hand—"whatever comes I know that you will be leal and true."

"Oh Ronald! do not trust me too much!"

"It will be a bad day for me on which I lose a grain of my faith in you," he answered quietly.

And she must wait a year before one irrevocable step set her free from her own doubts!

And so the winter came, with its storms and snows, and its sombre grandeur.

To Ronald and Marion these months were the happiest they had known for a long while. The wildness of the season brought something of the exhilaration of adventure into their daily lives. The hours of noonday darkness—the solemn nights, brilliant with the witchery of northern lights—the rushing clouds rolled along by stormy winds—the abrupt gorgeous changes of colouring in the skies—all these fell in with Ronald's mood.

The stalking season too was over, and now it seemed to him as if his snowy glens and frost-bound hills belonged to him once more.

"Ronald is just like a bottled wasp as long as the shooting is going on," said Grizel.

In all these years he had not for a moment swerved from or repented his boyish vow never to touch a gun, but at times it made Dalbraith almost unbearable to him.

Born and bred a mountaineer, the instincts of a sportsman were too strongly rooted in him to be torn up by one shock.

He could not help a desperate longing after the old wild sport—that most natural outlet for the fiery energy of his nature. For a year or two he had gone out deer-stalking with his father, and the memory of those days of keen delight were as intense and fresh as if they were of yesterday. He was angry with himself that it should be so, but when, as sometimes happened, Lord Sandysmere started from Dalbraith for a distant beat, by the starlight of an October morning, Ronald used to lie awake listening to the sounds of the departure, with strained ears and widely-open eyes, before which one picture stood out with singular pertinacity.

It was a picture that was made up of black wildness and grey desolation. Evening—with the mist curling and floating thickly round some dark rocks that formed a mountain-top—steep barren heights, for it was above the reach of any vegetation, except some brown fern round a giddy ledge that hung over a chasm. And among the fern above the dry bed of a winding torrent, a group of deer.

He and his father had had a hard day's work, and this was its reward. He remembered how his heart beat when Lord Douglas's rifle was raised, and how he heard Fergus's hurried breathing, and then a volley of echoes that thundered back from the rocks. The stag fell, and the blinding mist presently rolled down over them like a curtain.

"That was a very *young* thing—that vow, or oath, or whatever you may choose to call it, of poor Ronald's," said Lord Sandysmere once to Norma Douglas.

"It was made, however," the General answered, gravely.

"True; I only feel that it puts him at a disadvantage among his Highland neighbours. Don't mew him up too closely at Dalbraith, General. Let him come to me and have a little hunting this winter. He would shut himself up in La Trappe to please you, and small blame to him; but he looks terribly restless now and then—uncomfortably like a bottled wasp, as Cousin Grizel says."

General Douglas smiled securely. "We have his load-star here, luckily," he said. "Let him go and hunt by all means, if he wishes it, but I fancy he will not care to wander far when he leaves his ladye love behind."

"My dear old friend," answered Lord Sandysmere, laughing, "you are a very knight of the round table, and you ought to have been born in the sixth century."

He went away south for his hunting and his covert-shooting, but his thoughts often returned to the people with whom he had of late been living, and at Easter he managed to assemble a good many of them at Sandysmere.

Kenneth came among the rest. He had been trying honestly all the winter to forget Marion and to reconcile himself to the new order of things, and he arrived at Sandysmere rather in the mood to "treat resolution," like the Irishman. At first, Ronald was not there, and things went smoothly enough. He was constantly with Marion. Her engagement not being announced, was seldom mentioned between them, and she never now reproached him or entreated him to free himself from his secret. Kenneth was content to bask in the sweet, grave kindness of her manner, and Marion told herself that she rejoiced in having got the brother of her childhood back again. Poor child, she was attempt-

ing a difficult task. She was trying hard to keep a bandage over her eyes. Now and then it slipped aside for a moment, and an unwelcome light streamed in and startled her, but in general she succeeded in keeping her misgivings at a distance.

But Kenneth made no attempt to blind himself. It was only late on the Saturday evening that Ronald joined the party, and already the sky was overcast with clouds, and dark with storm for Kenneth. He could not keep still when he saw Marion with his cousin. This gnawing misery and restlessness was a new feeling. It was one thing, he discovered, to think of Marion as yielded to his rival by an act of magnanimity of his own, and quite another to see her quietly claimed by Ronald as a right.

Yesterday evening, after his arrival, Ronald kept her out till late, lingering on the terrace to listen to the nightingales. Kenneth, meanwhile, sat in the lighted drawing-room with his head bent over a newspaper, apparently deeply engrossed, but in reality only watching with jealous impatience for the sound of their steps and voices. And this morning, before church, Ronald asked her to go with him to see the old Den, and as Kenneth passed the open door, he saw them standing in the window, Marion holding a letter which Ronald was reading also, with his hand resting on her shoulder.

Kenneth said to himself that it was unbearable, and he walked off sternly with his father to a distant church that he might be out of their way.

But in the afternoon, he was on the watch again. He would talk to nobody; said he did not wish for any luncheon, and put aside Granny's solicitude on the plea of a racking headache. Once or twice he saw Marion looking at him imploringly, but he

took no notice of her. It seemed easy enough for her to do without him. She was as well pleased to be with one person apparently, as another. Let Ronald have it all his own way if he chose. *He* certainly should not dream of interfering. And yet a few minutes afterwards he found some pretext on which to send the children into the conservatory, to disturb the *tête-à-tête* among the palm trees and azaleas. After that he grew angry with himself for his childishness. What would be gained even if he did part them for half an hour?

The walk home under the hawthorns after church exhausted Kenneth's powers of endurance. The brilliant sunshine and the careless talk palled on him in his jealous wretchedness. He longed to be by himself, but somehow could not tear himself away, leaving those two always together. The scattered groups joined again as they came into the park. Douglas had found a deserted partridge's nest in the long grass, and he and Marion were intent on carrying it to the keeper's house. There they fell in with Lord Sandysmere's sister Mary, who with her husband and children had been doing the honours of her brother's house, while it was full of guests. She was leaning over the gate of the keeper's garden, and talking to the old lady in her Sunday bonnet who stood within.

"Yis, yis," Mrs. Ringer was saying, as Kenneth gloomily following, joined the group round the gate; "my husband, he were in Scotland last harvest time along with my lord, but he weren't no matters there. He didn't fare to like himself at all, and that's the truth."

"Do you hear, Ronald?" said his aunt, turning round. "Ringer did not like himself at Dalbraith. What do you say to that?"

"Lawk!" said the old woman, "he hadn't a mind to go and leave his 'buds' (*Anglice*—partridges), John hadn't, and it fatagued me a good bit to have him go; but 'twere a change for my lord, that were it. 'Tis a change, Mrs. Ringer,' he sa' to me, my lord sa'. 'Lawk, lordship,' I sa' to him, 'and what du yu want of a change together, and a fine sight o' buds tu, a wanting badly to be killed at yours?' But he was right consistent, my lord was, for to go."

"Ah," said Lord Sandysmere, "John didn't much like the hills."

"Well, my lord; I don't expect that not no one —begging the young gentleman's pardon—I shouldn't expect no one could abide them hills, save them as are fo'sed to preside in them," with a curtsey and a smile to Ronald. "John was hampered to sit the chay, a going twisting up them, and his dear limbs, he told me when he got home, they right racked with climbing—that they did—right racked!"

"But John did think it a fine country, surely, Mrs. Ringer," pleaded Douglas, while Kenneth, wondering what they all found to amuse them in gossiping with a prejudiced old woman, grimly walked away.

"Well, sir," and Mrs. Ringer tried to recall some compliment, "if so be as he did, he didn't name of it to me, not as I can collect myself. There were a goodish tidy sized lot of he'th, he sa', but the land was but very moderate; and he didn't see a tunup—not to call a tunup—the hull of the time he were there, and not a tree—if you'll believe me, for I'm tellin' of yu the treuth—not a blessed tree in all the forest; and that fare kind of onsatisfactory now, Miss Mary, don't it?"

What nonsense it all seemed to Kenneth.

"I told them to put your tea under the cedars," he presently heard Lord Sandysmere say to his sister. "The General and I are off for a long walk."

Kenneth went up on to the terrace by himself, and stood with folded arms watching them all in the garden below. Sir Charles Stuart presently betook himself to the smoking-room. Marion as she passed, looked up and beckoned to her cousin, but he pretended to be looking another way.

He and a gorgeous peacock that was perched on the terrace-wall, were left quite alone. Every one else seemed to belong to somebody. At this hour yesterday he and Marion were riding slowly homewards down the great avenue. The sun was pouring long level beams between the boles of the huge beeches, now and then gilding Marion's fair hair, or lighting up her face as she rode in and out of the shadow. The quiet evening world seemed to belong to them alone, and they to belong to each other. To-day——

"Why did you not come with us?" suddenly asked Marion's voice close beside him.

Kenneth was leaning on the balustrade at the top of the garden-steps. He had to move aside in order to let her pass. He did so in silence, but she stood still and repeated her question.

"I don't think that is a very kind question, Marion," he answered, without looking at her.

"Kenneth!" and she put her hand on his arm.

He freed himself and walked two or three steps away. Love and honour were tugging at his heart-strings, dragging him in opposite directions, and within the last hour a new resolve had been half-formed in his mind—should he put it into Marion's hands to decide for him?

"London and the world again to-morrow," said Agénor de Beaurepaire, coming up with a tragic air. "The last evening in the peaceful country."

He was a small, dark, lively young fellow, so by the law of contraries he greatly admired his English cousin's fair, graceful head and slender figure.

"It has been a pleasant time," she answered, rather absently.

"To-day especially," added Kenneth, with a sneer.

It was his last chance, however, of speaking to her. "I rather want to ask you a question," he began, but he broke off with an impatient stamp, as Douglas ran up the steps.

"Don't go in yet, Marion," said this second interloper. "Come down with me to the mere to see the water-fowl."

Marion hesitated; Kenneth turned away directly, and went with quick strides into the house.

That evening after dinner, Lord Sandysmere proposed a toast. It had been a very cheery dinner, sociable and pleasant, as is often the case when the remnants of a large party gather together for the last time, and there is a round table, and one or two people who are willing to do all the talking.

"Farewell and good speed," said the host, "to Sir Charles Stuart and his new aide-de-camp."

Several people looked up. Kenneth, who had been talking much and gaily, stopped suddenly now, and looked at Marion.

"We know the General," said one; "but the aide-de-camp—"

"To the unknown aide-de-camp," added Douglas, raising his glass.

Marion turned to her father. Lady Beatrix, smiling, held out her hand to Kenneth, who sat beside her.

"I see Granny is in the secret," observed Lord Sandysmere; "but I was under the impression that you all knew."

"What is it?" asked Marion, leaning forward, and speaking to General Douglas.

"Only that Kenneth is going out to India with your father. I am glad to say he does not care to dawdle away his life at London parties."

"He never thought of it until just before dinner to-day," observed Sir Charles Stuart drily.

"Well, you are an enviable fellow," said Douglas.

"Do you think so?" responded Kenneth.

"Marion," said Lord Sandysmere, "you have not done proper honour to my toast. I can't let any of you off."

She turned towards Kenneth, and caught his eyes fixed on her.

"To your good health, Kenneth." Her voice was quite clear and steady; but he was rather pale, and only nodded in answer to her pledge.

That evening the nightingales sang unheeded. Marion was tired, and made her escape early to her own room.

* * * * *

A few weeks of incessant bustle followed in London. Miss Montrose's hospitable house was again put into requisition; but this time nobody had leisure to look at the boats on the river, or to talk of anything but Indian outfits. When the chimes from Westminster came to them on the wind, there was no moralizing; it was only the sign that another busy, short-lived hour "had gone over to the majority."

Lady Beatrix and Marion were allowed, as a special favour, to go down as far as Dover to see their travellers off. Everybody was especially tender

over Granny just now, she was so brave and serene; but they all knew that it was not likely she would ever see her son again. He and Kenneth were going out overland, and General Douglas was to go with them to Paris.

The last dinner at the Ship Hotel was over; that odd last dinner, with its disjointed talk about common interests which have been snapped in two, and a future that divides itself sharply to-night into diverging lines. The night boat was to start in an hour or two.

Marion and Kenneth had gone out upon the balcony overlooking the harbour. It was a dark and quiet night. The lamps were lighted along the quays, and each one dropped down a quivering reflection on the water beneath. Now and then the murmur of the tide outside was heard, and the swell and splash of a stray wave that had wandered into the harbour, and broken against its wall.

A German band was playing a little way off, its tones sweetened and softened by the distance. It had gone through its repertoire of well-worn opera-airs and of German valses, and now it had fallen on to Mendelssohn's farewell song, wherein is all the yearning, the resignation, and the hope, of parting. The refrain especially which comes back often, tells its own story so plainly that the words, "*Auf Wiedersehen!*" sound as if really spoken instead of only rendered by the music.

"When shall you see Douglas?" asked Kenneth, so suddenly that Marion started.

"I do not know," she answered, not quite steadily, as he could hear.

"Poor Marion," he said; "it will be better for you, as well as for me, when we are off. You can't help caring for your old friends."

"Why should I?" answered Marion.

"Why, indeed. I hope it does not hurt you to remember. As for me, it is high time I was away. There is no place left for me at home. If it is any particular comfort to you to know it, Marion," he continued, with a sudden access of bitterness, "you may assure yourself that the old blunder has been well avenged. Douglas has the best of it, after all. It is a strange Nemesis that has overtaken that mistake of poor old Adam's; for through it, all I cared for in the world has gone to Douglas. It has made him far dearer to my father than I can ever be—and now—you——"

"Kenneth," said Marion, putting a hand that trembled violently on his arm, "it is not too late—put the wrong right before you go—tell your father to-night."

If there had been light enough he would have seen how her eyes were burning, her cheeks glowing with a sudden hope.

He lifted up his hand—"Now? Less than ever. What would be gained now? Spare me—to-night; don't let us begin it all over again. Leave the past alone. Do you think I would lightly refuse any wish of yours, Marion?"

"I would stand by you," said Marion, breathlessly; "we would face it all together. Oh, Kenneth!"

"Not even for that—not even for that. It can serve no good end now. Would you have me kill my father? Don't ask me to take his curse away with me. Pity me—my love—my love."

He leant forward on the balcony, and buried his face in his hands. Marion stood by him, almost giddy from the dazzle of her momentary hope, and its quick extinction.

"You think I am false," said Kenneth, abruptly raising his head. "I know you do; but, at all events, I will be true in one thing before I go. We won't go on acting quite to the end—you and I!" He was not looking at her, but out at the dark water with the trembling reflections of light. "We are parting to-night, and God knows when I shall see your face again——"

"*Auf Wiedersehen! Auf Wiedersehen!*" sighed the band below.

"Shall I speak the truth for once, Marion—shall I?"

"No Kenneth."

"No? not even now. You are hard. Don't go away. I dare say you are right, dear; I believe you always are right. But don't go away just yet. You used to like to stay with me when we were two children at Dalbraith."

Oh, the spell of those old days! It was strong upon her still; and in terrible contrast with the quietness of his words was the suppressed pain and passion in his voice. She turned away from him that he might not see that which she knew was in her face.

"Stay a little longer, Marion," he resumed; "I only want to talk about old times. Do you know that you and I had a quarrel once in the old days—a quarrel!—it seems odd, doesn't it? a quarrel between you and me—but we really had. You were right then, as usual. Do you remember? It was only about something I wanted you to do without leave, and you wouldn't do it; you said it wasn't right. No more it was. I was angry with you then. Now I am more reasonable."

Marion could not quite keep back the sound of a half-caught sigh.

"I am not angry now, Marion. I know what I have forfeited and lost. I was angry with you then; but you did not go away—you tried hard to make it up. You said: 'But you do love me still, Kenneth?' and I wouldn't answer. Love you! I remember it—'You do love me,'—poor little, dear, sweet Marion."

"Don't Kenneth," she whispered.

He turned towards her suddenly and seized both her hands. "But I mean to answer your question now, after all these years; and I say to it, Yes, yes, yes, Marion—with my whole heart—for my whole life—whatever you may do."

He lifted both her hands and pressed them passionately, one after another, to his lips. "And now," he said, "you may go away and leave me if you like."

She turned without a word, and went in at the open window.

Down at the end of the pier the packet was getting up its steam, and panting in the darkness as if eager to be off. They could see the column of black smoke rising, and the sparks fly upward from the chimney. Another steamer, with its paddles beating the calm black water, and its lights burning, came gliding quietly up to the pier-side.

Outward and homeward bound. Therein was all the difference—the gulf that lies between joyful meetings and dismal partings—between gladness and great pain.

In the room behind the balcony Lady Beatrix sat, very pale and quiet, holding her son's hand. There was a slight bustle beginning—people coming in to carry off dispatch-boxes and travelling-bags—a little shiver now that the last moment drew so near—a few more sham smiles and would-be

careless words. Then a bell rang, long, loud, discordant.

"Marion," said Kenneth, opening the door of the sitting-room, "will you come here for one minute?"

He had crossed the room from the balcony after she left him, and had gone to his own room. The door at which he now stood opened into a long corridor.

"We must be off directly, Kenneth," said Sir Charles.

"I am ready, sir; only a minute—Marion—"

She went to him.

The passage was lighted, and people were passing up and down. "I have a question to ask you," he said very calmly, taking her hand. "My father is coming across with us. I shall have an hour or two with him. If I do as you wish, and tell him that I shot Lord Douglas, will you give up Ronald?"

Marion felt as if the ground had opened beneath her feet; she had no time to think—to consider—only one second in which to take firm hold of her loyalty to Ronald.

"Never, Kenneth; never."

"Think before you resolve," he went on. "There is still one moment before you need decide—remember that it is all which you have wished."

Something like the sound of rushing waters was in Marion's ears, and a flood was closing over her head deafening and blinding her. That she could clear Ronald by a word—that Kenneth would be delivered from his long captivity to a lie—that she might feel free again! Then another thought, which brought a dull aching pain—that like a garment cast off because no longer needed, Kenneth had thrown by his ever-ready excuse that he could not

grieve his father. What did he mean? Why at the last moment had he come to her like this? She stood staring at him.

"Speak, Marion."

"But you said it would kill your father," she said faintly, not knowing whether she meant the words as a reproach or not.

"You are more than all the world to me," he answered.

There were movements in the room within; some one approached the door; Kenneth laid his hand on the lock and looked at her; she looked back, and knew that she loved him and despised him.

"If I tell, will you give up Ronald?"

There seemed to Marion but one answer to give to that. She grasped it as a drowning man catches at a rope. "I cannot."

Without another word he opened the door and motioned her to pass him.

Sir Charles got up as they entered. It was very quickly over after that. They told Lady Beatrix that she must not go down to the pier, and she yielded with a smile. Marion stayed with her. She knew her father kissed her and blessed her—but though she was vaguely anxious about Granny, she could not see how she parted with her son, for Kenneth had approached her again, and with his white lip quivering into a sort of smile, was holding her hand and whispering huskily: "Marion, you always used to look after my things—keep this safe for me—it was my mother's. Good-bye. God bless you—and him."

He put something into her hand, on which her fingers closed mechanically. When she opened them an hour afterwards, a little old-fashioned diamond ring was lying in her palm.

"Come, my boy," said General Douglas, and the convulsive grasp that was crushing her fingers was loosened.

The two women—both tearless—went out on to the balcony. "*Auf Wiedersehen,*" called out somebody from below. The dark figures that it was not light enough to distinguish, moved away. Neither Marion nor her grandmother spoke, until, wonderfully soon, the swish of parting waters sounded through the gloom, the lights out yonder moved—turned—and something dark went forth into the open sea.

Then Lady Beatrix went away to her own room. The tears of old age are few; those she shed were very quiet, though she felt weary and broken; but when the sobs that Marion was trying to stifle in her pillow reached her ears from the next room, her first impulse was to go and carry comfort to the poor young heart that needed it.

Marion had given way at last, and had flung herself upon her bed, with her eyes hidden from the light, but by-and-by a very soft hand was laid upon her head, and a kiss fell on her hair.

"Are you crying for your Daddy, Marion?" said the tender voice. "Tell Granny. Hush, child; *you* will see him again."

There was an unconscious stress laid upon the "you," and it contained an appeal that even then Marion understood.

She sat up and put both her arms round her grandmother. Lady Beatrix was nearly frightened, for she always thought of Marion as of one reticent and strong, and now to see her shaken and bowed down with sobs, made her dread some unknown trouble. She steadied her little slight figure as well as she could, for the girl had flung herself with

all her weight upon her grandmother, who could only support herself by grasping the post of the bed with one hand, while she drew the poor child closely to her with the other, and said quietly, "You will stop crying, Marion, and then you will tell Granny."

"But I am afraid it isn't because of Daddy," said Marion, as soon as she could speak. Presently she raised herself, pushed back her hair, and added sorrowfully: "Granny, I am very wicked, and I don't know how to be good again."

Lady Beatrix grasped her hand closely, but she waited and said nothing.

Marion went on. "He said he knew I should be leal and true, and I am false, Granny."

"My child, I don't understand yet."

"I promised Ronald," answered Marion, and then she got up and stood on her feet: "I promised Ronald, but I love Kenneth with all my heart and soul."

"You will do what is right, my Marion," answered Lady Beatrix, after a pause.

"Oh, Granny, tell me what is right. I love Kenneth," she repeated, "with all my heart and soul."

And there was a little diamond ring which had fallen when she rose, and which lay now glittering at her feet.

CHAPTER XIV

A LEGACY

"'O lassie, I maun lo'e thee;'
'O laddie, lo'e na me,
Lo'e them what ha'e their hearts at hame,
Mine's lang been far frae me.'"

It was nearly two years after Kenneth had gone with Sir Charles Stuart to India, that Lord Douglas sat by himself one evening, leaning his head thoughtfully on his left hand, while with the other he scribbled after an idle fashion over the blotting-paper of the portfolio before him.

A sheet of thin foreign writing-paper lay under his hand, placed there half-an-hour ago, but most of his time since, had been spent standing absently at the window, and looking through the crowded masts of the shipping in the port of Genoa, at the sea which lay beyond, shining like sapphire under a setting sun.

The letter was apparently a difficult one to write, or else he was in a lazy mood. At last he dipped his pen into the ink, gave it an impatient preliminary shake, and began rapidly.

"*Hotel de la Croix de Malte,*
Genoa.

"My dear Mother,

"An old friend of yours and of my father's, Monsieur de Beaurepaire, has just died in this hotel.

He was ill only for a short time and was quite alone here, but hearing from his servant that Hugh Raymond's yacht was in the harbour, and that I was on board, he sent for me, and I have been with him for the last few days.

"He has charged me with a message, and a parting request to you—sufficiently strange one certainly—and one which I feel it rather difficult to communicate to you in writing."

Douglas stopped here and glanced back over his opening sentences. "It is begun at all events, and that is the great thing," he muttered to himself; "it sounds about as formal as a lawyer's letter, but never mind. I cannot write differently to her. Well——"

"He begged me to bring to your recollection a Christmas you spent at Sandysmere nine years ago; he met you there, and then saw my father for the last time. He believes you will remember some conversations he had with you both, and a wish he then expressed, which wish, as he repeated several times, circumstances had long since, he was well aware, put it out of your power to fulfil.

"As I have no clue to the subject of the conversation he was referring to, I may not render his meaning very clearly, but I will only repeat as well as I can, that which I understood him to wish me to convey to you. He desires that you should be reminded of some kind words spoken by my father before they parted at Sandysmere, and of a promise given by him, in both your names, to help an old friend if ever it was in your power to do so."

Ronald had written quickly enough hitherto. Now he stopped, frowned, and bit the end of his pen in perplexity.

"You know all about the Beaurepaires, I believe,

so I need not tell you that the eldest son, Gaston," —(here was another pause, and a good deal of scratching out),—" that poor Gaston has not hitherto borne a particularly high character. Uncle Norman can tell you all about him, and of course you remember—" but through that sentence also Douglas drew his pen after a few minutes pondering.

" There," he said, " that must do, if only she can make anything of the blotted bits—Uncle Norman knows."

" On account of all this," the letter went on, " M. de Beaurepaire could not at present leave Gaston guardian of his only daughter (of course you know that there is an only daughter), and Agénor, the other brother, is too young, and is knocking about the world, and altogether unfit to take charge of his sister. She is about—"

" Ronald ! " and a head was suddenly put in at the door.

" For goodness' sake go away, my dear fellow," said Douglas impatiently, " and don't bother me just now, whatever you do ! "

" I have just come ashore," said Hugh Raymond, advancing into the room, and showing signs of settling himself in an armchair. " They told me, downstairs, that your friend was dead."

" Yes, he is ; but I have got a letter to write, so pray don't sit there staring at me, or I shall never get it done. I never in my life had such a queer sort of letter to write."

" Then you can't come out, or settle when you will be ready to get off. I am getting rather sick of Genoa, do you know? Couldn't we sail tonight? "

" We can't sail at all unless you leave me alone. I tell you I must get this letter off my mind, and I can't do it unless I am by myself."

" Well—" and Hugh Raymond, easy going though slightly aggrieved, took himself off again.

Left alone, Ronald turned back to his writing, then pushed away his chair, and paced up and down the room.

" There, it has all gone out of my head. I knew it would, and I had got it all pat if I had not been interrupted. What in the name of fortune was I going to say? ' She is about '—about what?—and who is ' she? ' Oh, the girl. Yes, well, come, how anxious he was about her, poor old fellow, and he did say my father had promised to look after her. It was an odd thing to do, and I certainly never heard of it—however—"

" The young lady," he wrote, " seems to have no near relations, and her poor father was uncommonly anxious that you should have her at Dalbraith, to be with you and near Granny, at least until such time as one of her brothers can marry and make a home for her."

(" There ! it is out. What will my mother say? —a French young lady at Dalbraith ! ")

" I know it was a bold thing for me to make anything like a promise in your name, my dear mother, but I was fairly puzzled : M. de Beaurepaire was so convinced that you would be more than willing to carry out that which he believed to be a real wish of my father's—the wish to help him in the perplexity he already foresaw, if he were ever to leave his daughter without any natural protector. He leaves her in your hands. His wish, as I gathered from some words he let fall, would be that she should eventually marry an Englishman—at least he seemed to have some such fancy in his mind."

Here Ronald laid down his pen, and leaning forward with his eyes shaded by his hands, recalled the scene he had witnessed only yesterday.

The dying man had pleaded his cause most eagerly. Death had come upon him at unawares, and in a strange place. He was alone. One son, for whom he would not send, was an inveterate gambler—the other a mere boy, to whom it would be a mockery to leave the sole care of a young sister.

With the persistency that belonged to his character, his thoughts had recurred to the old wish of many years ago, which indeed he had never entirely laid aside. It may be that the tidings of Lord Douglas being in the bay, on board his friend's yacht, had rekindled it into fresh vigour. It is likely too, that in his weakness, his mind had wandered back to the great friendship of his early days, and to the associations of his youth. He had always liked the young Ronald, and felt confidence in him, even in those melancholy days when his son Gaston won him over for a brief space to his own evil ways.

It seemed to him now, that the young man had been sent by a higher Power to be the solace of his death-bed.

The thought of leaving Diane all alone weighed with increasing heaviness on him as his end drew near, and he felt remorsefully that he had never cared for her future as he should have done.

Visions, faint and often shifting, had come and gone before his eyes during the long solitary nights. Out of the shadows a girl's young face shaped itself before him—a lovely, impatient, sensitive little face.

Sometimes it was a very small child he saw, sitting on the floor with her legs stretched out in front of her, staring gravely at him with a pair of wonderful dark-fringed grey eyes.

Sometimes he heard a sweet, loud, shrill laugh, and caught a glimpse of the bright face peeping at him over the gallery of a great staircase. And then a voice said, "*Ne riez pas si fort, Mademoiselle Diane,*" and a door was shut. How those words tormented him, and echoed wearily through his fevered brain. He wished he had looked up and laughed back at the child, before the door was shut.

His servant heard him moaning, and came noiselessly up to the bedside, but he closed his eyes, and motioned him away.

Again, he saw a lonely little figure in an old garden, with brown, bronzed hair blown about over her forehead, standing on tiptoes to kiss a tall white lily.

Oftenest of all there came to him the picture of a young girl in a dim room, with her head raised, and her small red mouth half open. She is singing; he can hear the strong, clear, liquid notes, the grave old harmony. 'Agnus Dei'—it is Pergolesi's music that she sings. Oh, child, he hears the grand, sweet words—sing on! 'Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi.'

Morning comes, the loud, clashing bells from the campanile close at hand, ring for matins, the feverish visions are gone. In sober earnest he is thinking of her fate. He longs to place her under the care of Lady Douglas. Young as Lord Douglas was, he could surely constitute him in some sort her guardian, as his mother's representative. In her name he now asks him to promise that the child shall never, with her sanction, marry other than a "good" man.

"Some one that is above reproach," he said; "some one whom she can look up to—not a man of the world, such as I have been—with the world's creed, the world's way of looking at right and wrong.

Somehow one grows to see things differently lying here. Don't let my poor little girl have an unhappy life, as I think hers would be if she could not respect her husband. Let him be a good Christian, Douglas, as your Uncle Norman is a Christian, stainless and devout, loyal and humble. Are there such men in the world?—the good God send such an one to guard and bless my Diane!"

"And above all," he added, raising himself up on his pillows in his eagerness, and fixing his sunken glowing eyes on Douglas; "above all, promise in your mother's name as well as your own, that she will never consent to her marriage, with a man who has been a gambler."

Douglas started and winced. The sick man saw the eyes which were fixed compassionately on his, waver as a candle wavers in a draught of air; but he gave the promise required briefly and without comment: "As far as shall be in my power," he said quietly.

"If things had been otherwise," Monsieur de Beaurepaire went on, "I do not scruple to tell you that I might have wished you to be yourself my child's husband, but now that can never be—I do not think of it."

"I know," said Ronald, bending down his head while a quick red flush dyed his forehead.

M. de Beaurepaire looked at him kindly. "You understand me, Douglas, I should have wished it, under other circumstances. I once spoke of it to your dear father. It has been a disappointment to me, I admit; but it is wholly out of the question now —I know that."

"Yes," repeated Ronald, rather bitterly. "I understand."

"I have wounded you," said the other, watching him; "that indeed, was far from my intention."

"You are quite right," and Douglas frankly clasped the hand that was extended to him; but there was a look of keen regret and trouble in his face that M. de Beaurepaire could not understand, and for which Ronald could hardly have accounted himself.

The two were at cross-purposes. Diane's father believed the young man to be betrothed to his cousin, Marion Stuart; and on his side Douglas understood himself to be numbered among those persons who would be unfit to have the care of a young wife entrusted to them.

It renewed an old impression which many things during the last two years had contributed to strengthen—that he was for ever unworthy of the love of a good woman.

It did not strike him that M. de Beaurepaire could be referring to his brief engagement to Marion. How should any report of it have reached him? He himself seldom remembered it now. He never looked back if he could help it, but to-day as he sat there with his letter to his mother lying unfinished before him, his thoughts wandered unchecked over that closed chapter of his life, with its abrupt, jarring termination.

He hated thinking of it. It was strangely puzzling to him why the events of that time should have been suffered to take place.

They had driven him out again from the home to which he had been striving to bind himself by fresh and strong ties. They had caused the first and only cloud that had ever arisen between him and the best friend of all his life, Norman Douglas, and they had added two years of aimless wandering, at first of utter recklessness, to the blotted empty chronicle of his existence.

Long ago he had forgiven Marion, and looking back, he could well believe that she had tried her best to be true to a man she could not love. He even acknowledged now that it was better for them both to have parted when they did, but all the same he wondered over that old mistake and its weary consequence.

And Marion wondered too, wondered sadly, in the bitterness of her heart. At first, in blank despair, she could see no more than that she had missed the right path; that, with all her lofty resolves to give herself up to duty, she had somehow fallen into a grievous error.

Alas for the many mistakes and false steps in the world!—if indeed this world were all. But if it is only the ante-chamber to a larger life; if it is by their falls and failures that the Master trains His servants for a work that will be nobler and higher than any they are fit for here, then they may well be patient with themselves, and may wait hopefully on Him.

Marion had not learnt to be patient. She only felt that, after Kenneth went away, darkness and perplexity were round her. It would have been easy to go forward along a clear path of duty, however rough it might have been; easy even to stand still and wait to be shown the way; but she had come to a place where many conflicting roads met and crossed and confused her—she must needs choose one, but which among the many was the right one, she could not tell. In her dire perplexity she learnt to pray, and then to trust, for the one step that she needed at a time was always shown to her.

The days following her parting with Kenneth were the darkest. But by degrees one thing began to grow clear to her, and that was, that her own

words of love to Kenneth had separated her from Ronald for ever. She could not knowingly deceive him; she could not add to her involuntary disloyalty that deeper wrong.

So she too—she whom he loved, and thought to be so worthy of his faith—she too must turn from him! Her hand must wound him—and he trusted her so frankly and thought so humbly of himself.

For a time she rebelled fiercely against that older, stronger love, which she could not disallow! Why must she turn from the higher nature, to cling against her will, to the lower?—for she saw with a melancholy helpless clearness which of the two men was the more worthy.

But she was not free to choose. The consciousness of a strong, unwilling, slowly-deepening affection had gradually dawned on her; a consciousness that she dreaded and resisted, that terrified and humbled her.

She, the proud true Marion, to love one who had fallen as Kenneth had done! She, who had suffered so deeply through him—who had so loathed his sin! She who was promised to another!

And yet by the strong chain of a life-long memory—by his passionate love, by his winning tongue, by his bursts of sadness, by her very yearning sorrow over him, and by her prayers and tears for him—he held her heart in his.

She could not help herself; she could not keep his image from standing between her and Ronald.

And so there was no other way. She must tell Ronald the truth, and leave herself in his hands.

If he had been angry with her it would have been far easier to bear it; if he had been less manly and generous in his pain and his forgiveness, she might have forgiven herself sooner. But he would

not blame her; he tried, after the first, not to let her see how she had hurt him.

"Wait a minute," he said to her when first the drift of her hurried stumbling sentences began to reach his understanding, "give me your hand. Do not speak directly;" and she saw him straighten himself as if to receive a blow. He stood gathering together his powers of self-command, for he guessed what was coming. His eyes gleamed, and his chest heaved.

Marion stood before him like a culprit. "You are not going to throw me over," he said huskily. "That is impossible."

She raised her eyes to his. Should she never again see that look of pleading trust bent on her?

At that moment she knew nothing, felt nothing, but that she could not grieve him. For a few breathless, suffocating moments her purpose wavered. Might she not, even at the eleventh hour, spare herself and him? Was it not her duty to stand by her plighted word? Was it not love, real love, that was hurting her like this?

And then like the swing of a pendulum came the swift reaction. She thought of Kenneth, and her head sank low in shame. Could she be doubly disloyal?—untrue alike to Ronald and to him? God forgive her, she prayed, and grant her courage.

"Ronald," she forced herself to say, though her voice was so faint that he had to bend down his head to hear her—"before Kenneth went"—and then the words failed.

"Kenneth," he repeated; "is it that? Kenneth? You must go on now."

"Kenneth and I—Oh, Ronald! we were always together; we have always loved each other—forgive us."

"Always?"

"I did not know it," she said, clasping her hands together.

There was a dead silence, broken only by one or two long-drawn breaths.

"Why did you accept me, Marion?" he asked at last.

How was she to answer?—the colour dyed her pale face crimson. "I wanted—to marry you," she said in a low voice.

"And yet you cared all the time for Kenneth."

"Yes."

"I do not understand."

She tried to speak again. Oh, if only she could have told him all. If only she might have shown him the purpose of her life, and at least given a reason for her strange attempt and failure. But no, she must endure being misjudged. In vain she struggled to utter a word or two; her heart beat too violently for any sound to come. He saw it.

"Do not be frightened, Marion," he said gently. "Of course you are free to do as you like best."

"It is not that—it is not that. I don't want to be happy. I can never be happy again; but I am forced to tell the truth to you."

"Of course."

Ronald turned away from her, setting his teeth and clenching his hands in his effort to keep silent. Bitter words were crowding on to his lips, but he forced them back; grief, reproaches, anger, contempt for Kenneth, struggled for utterance; but though Marion was deserting him he could not help believing in her still.

"I thought you loved me," he said at last, and in those simple words lay the one reproach he made her.

But it was part of Marion's punishment to know that she had done him harm; that though he treated her with the generous chivalry that belonged to him, yet that afterwards he was hardened and embittered by the pain he would not show. She had never more than half-understood him, and yet she feared for him; feared that he would lose all faith in hope and love.

He left her at last with a kind, resolute smile, and a few words of full forgiveness; but he left her to fight his battle by himself. And in that battle for a while he was a loser. He grew reckless, believing that no one in the world cared much what became of him. "Everything goes against me," he said to himself, and the few months that followed his parting with Marion were dark and bad ones—the worst of all his life. There is no need to dwell on them. They were full of misery, and hateful to remember afterwards.

He asked her before he went away, not to let General Douglas hear that his son had any share in separating them. "It would cut him to the quick," he said, "and I will not have him grieved if I can help it."

"Another secret!" said Marion, with a sigh of weariness. Ronald looked at her. "I know of no former secret," he said gravely, "and I think I have a right to ask you this."

But as it happened, Kenneth himself made confession to his father, before he bade him farewell, of his luckless love.

The General was shocked and grieved. However, as Kenneth told the story—and indeed as he believed—Marion had remained faithful to her troth-plight, and he did not even know from any spoken word that his affection for her was returned.

Thus the blow which would have been a heavy one was broken to his father. It was all over before he returned to England, and, indeed, as Grizel said, "The General had no person to thank but himself, for he had given the bairns neither peace nor rest until they said they were in love with each other, to oblige him."

And the General submitted to this rebuke with such unwonted meekness that it was believed he must see some justice in it.

It was afterwards that he and Ronald had a quarrel. The young man insisted on his uncle's sanctioning some sort of an engagement between Kenneth and Marion.

"Everyone knew they cared for one another," he said, "and what could be the use of keeping them apart? At all events," he added haughtily, "remember that *I* do not choose to stand between them. Quixotism does not answer in the present age, Uncle Norman. You had better consent."

General Douglas was grievously offended. The words and the tone both stung him. But time, the great wonder-worker, had its way with him at last. The old heat died out. Kenneth was distinguishing himself in India. He wrote, asking his father over and over again to grant him a word —only one word of hope.

"Marion," her uncle said to her one day, when she had been sitting by him for an hour, reading aloud the Indian newspapers, "are you going to be my daughter at some future time? Both the boys seem to have set their minds on it."

The girl looked up at him quickly as if she was about to speak, then stopped herself, and only bent down silently and kissed his hand. Once again her tongue was tied. How was she to explain

that though she had given up Ronald for Kenneth's sake, there was a bar between them still? All the pain she had gone through had numbed her. Sometimes she almost doubted whether she still loved Kenneth. And yet—well, she must say nothing. And so her consent was taken for granted, without words.

Lord Douglas meanwhile had joined an expedition formed for scientific purposes to Morocco. That season of wild travel did him good; it brought into play the patient energy of his character, and his great powers of endurance. Nature had perhaps intended him for a soldier, but as that life was denied him, a journey through an unknown and difficult country provided the best outlet for the love of danger and hardship, the delight in surmounting obstacles, and the love of nature in her wildest and most savage moods, that made a monotonous and joyless life at home almost unbearable to him. He fell in with his friend's yacht at Algiers, and was on his way to England when he met Monsieur de Beaurepaire at Genoa. The letter he presently sent home fell like a bomb-shell on the quiet household of Dalbraith. It was long indeed, since any event had broken in upon the even tenour of life in the old place.

This seemed like the ancient fairy tale reversed. The enchanted princess herself was coming to break the spell of sleep and silence that had fallen on the house. Her father had known how to use the one charm which would throw open its gates to her, when he pleaded for her welcome in the name of Lord Douglas.

Margaret never hesitated. She remembered that last Christmas at Sandysmere vividly; her own talk with René de Beaurepaire, and her husband's

real, though half-amused regret, that his old friend had not asked him to do anything that was within his power. She had always liked the Frenchman because of his genuine love and admiration for Douglas; and among the treasures that she kept carefully laid away was a letter written in a strain of almost passionate sorrow, which she had received from him in the early days of her widowhood.

They never met afterwards, for she refused his offer to come and visit her at Dalbraith; but she heard of him now and again through Norman Douglas, and she sometimes thought with interest of the motherless little daughter, whom he had been so anxious to present her with.

And now he was gone, and in dying had remembered and claimed his friend's old promise. Douglas, she knew, would have been eager to help, and now there was something that comforted and pleased Margaret in feeling that she could redeem a pledge which he had given. It seemed quite natural to her to accept Diane as a charge left her by her husband. She did not pause to consider any change that it might bring into her life.

With a gleam of solitary amusement she read Ronald's grave, unconscious reference to that queer project which the dead man once had so much at heart; but she did not give the "mot de l'enigme" even to Grizel.

For her part that worthy was overwhelmed with consternation. "The poor misguided lad," she said, "bringing a foreigner—an ambassador's daughter—a real French young lady, down upon us here, and I who have such a horror of everything that's to do with the French—haven't you, dear Granny?"

"Scarcely," answered Granny, dryly.

"Eh, not?—well, for certain, now I come to think upon it you're half a Frenchwoman yourself. How could I be so dull? Do pardon me, Granny. I only meant to say that they are all frivolous and treacherous, nothing more than that I assure you, so Marion need not glower at me like that."

"My dear Grizzy, it doesn't matter at all."

"Not that I wonder at her, if she thinks I meant a word against her Granny, or against the French nation either, poor things. They didn't make themselves, and after all they have pretty warm-hearted manners. I'm very partial to a warm manner; are not you, Margaret?

"And I dare say," continued Grizel, without waiting for an answer, "that this poor young creature will be as gay as a lark, for they have no depth of feeling; and though she has just lost her father, she won't be breaking her heart after him, as you, Marion, may well understand, seeing you have a wee droppie of French blood in your veins yourself. 'Out of sight out of mind' is the way with them all."

"That cap doesn't fit Marion," said Lady Beatrix, for Marion had coloured a little.

"Eh?" and Grizel looked about her with round innocent eyes. "I was but just passing the remark that we old folk will not be the worse for something to stir us up a little. I sometimes think we are all a thought too serious here. It's more befitting our years, without a doubt (not yours, Marion, for you are but a lassie yet, and I would fain see you blithe and gay again, singing up the stair as you used when you and poor Kenneth were young bairns), but it's becoming our years—Margaret's and mine, and Granny's too—to be thinking on our latter ends; only as I was saying, and I don't

know if you agree with me, Margaret, my dear, I do love a good laugh here and there myself. There's a music in it that rings in my old heart and does it good."

"Well," said Lady Beatrix, "and I dare say little Diane is a merry child."

"Child!" and Grizel resumed her solemn warning manner. "Child! eh, but are you aware that she is hard upon eighteen? They are women at that age—women of the world—married, some of them, poor bodies—and wholly taken up about their dress and their vanities and even worse," with a significant frown, followed by a shake of the head at Granny. "I have but a poor opinion of them, and I may say it out to you, seeing you got safe to Scotland yourself, before any harm could come to you."

"Well," said Lady Beatrix again, "we must hope for the best with this poor little girl, and try to make her happy."

"Aye; she'll surely be ill to please if she doesn't love this bonny spot," said Grizel, looking round her with loving eyes; "and after the dirty towns she has lived in—Paris or Rome,—and the French country that's as flat as an oaten cake, they tell me. And we *will* hope for the best," she added, with a burst of enthusiasm; "though I don't deny I have my fears when I think of her up-bringing. Look at her father—an ambassador"—(with withering scorn), "hanging about one foreign court or another all his days; not to speak of her grandfather whom none can think of as well respected that loves you, my dear, good Auntie—"

"We need not go back quite so far as that," said Lady Beatrix quietly.

"And no one will spoil Diane half as much as Grizel, when once she is here," added Marion.

Poor little Diane de Beaurepaire!—hers had been an odd, varied, broken life; but Grizel need not have been afraid. Ambassador's daughter she might be; and, of necessity, surrounded from her babyhood by all sorts of people; but she was too much of a child at the time of her father's death, ever to have been into what is called the world.

As a little thing of three years old her first remembrance was of a big German house, where she was allowed to wander about almost as she liked, and to make friends in her frank, innocent fashion, with all the people who came to see her father. This just suited the little maiden. She was a thorough romp, ripe for any mischief, and few people could resist her ringing laugh. Grave statesmen played with the merry child, and brought her sugar-plums; celebrated philosophers told her fairy tales; and artists, with world-wide fame, asked leave to paint her little face, and when she was taken to their studios, carried her about on their shoulders, that she might see their pictures better. The greatest of living musicians had been content to play soft, gay music for the little one, to accompany her as she danced fairy reels in the great empty reception-rooms of the Embassy.

Afterwards the scene of her little life shifted, and in place of the German city there was an Italian villa on the hills near Perugia, a villa with terrace-gardens, whereof the marble balustrades were broken; and with fountains where Tritons no longer caught the silver-bright water in the conch-shells they held out.

There, in the cosmopolitan fashion in which everything that concerned her was managed, Diane learnt from her father's elderly English groom to ride an English pony, cantering Tomboy gaily over

Italian hills, that were covered with chestnut and alive groves.

There were no philosophers or friendly statesmen here; but the garden was full of old statues that stood among orange trees. Some of them were statues of children, and for each one of these Diane composed a history out of her own head, and ended by loving them all as if they had been alive.

Often, sitting perched on the shoulder of an old stone river-god, with her arm thrown lovingly round his neck, Diane sang to her silent audience, sang with a gaiety and a pathos that showed the gift was in her. Often she told them stories, or sat in the sun meditating on the joys and sorrows she had invented for them. No one but a child could understand how real these were to her, how truly her foolish, kind little heart ached for the sorrows that only existed in her own fancy.

Once, a very worthless stucco image of a child got shaken out of its position as she was playing near the spot, and rolling down the bank on which its pedestal stood, fell into the fountain and disappeared under the green weeds and water-lilies.

Diane's bonne, sitting with her work under the oleander hard by, looked up startled by the splash; but what was her horror the next moment at seeing Diane rush down the bank like a flash of lightning, and plunge headlong into the fountain?

The excited group of gardeners and workmen, who presently arrived to her rescue, found her trying to scramble up the slippery marble side, with a quantity of long weeds dripping from her hair, and she was lifted out choking, and hugging close to her breast the mutilated remains of the little stucco figure.

Diane was carried home sobbing in dire disgrace,

with the headless image in her arms; broken-hearted only because it was little Léontine, whose mother would be so unhappy that Diane could not find her head at the bottom of the fountain.

"How like Diane!" some people said long years afterwards, when the little story of her naughty childhood was told against her. And so it was.

Not far from the villa the brown walls of a convent rose among the chestnut woods. The chapel bells used to arrest Diane at her play. Thither she often went guarded by her English governess, Mrs. Doran, to be made a great pet and plaything of by the kindly nuns. They taught her to make Venetian point-lace, and delicate sweet-meats; to concoct a mysterious green ointment warranted to cure all scalds and cuts, and various febrifuges out of herbs.

She used to run out of the great convent kitchen to meet Mrs. Doran, with a flushed face and dancing eyes. "Oh, Dolly, I have been making such a delicious mess!" "Dolly" thought that no "mess" ever came amiss to her busy little charge. Mud pies or cunning embroidery alike enchanted Diane. All manufactures were delightful to her. Set her down in an Irish cabin, and in a day or two she would have told you all about the distilling of "poteen."

And so her childhood passed—sometimes in lonely villas, sometimes in crowds and cities, but always learning, and always as merry as a little bird. Her father, to whom in his wandering life she was a care, a perplexity, an occasional plaything, often an incumbrance, used to shrug his shoulders despondingly, and wonder what life had in store for his pretty little girl. His chief wish concerning her was to make her as English, and as much like her mother as he could, and for that

reason he would gladly have given her into the keeping of Lady Douglas. Diane saw little of her brothers. Gaston was a great deal older than she was, and Agénor was always at his college. Sometimes he came home—a miniature man, very prim and well-behaved, and rather inclined to lecture his wild little sister.

The great blessing of Diane's life was her English governess, not a very accomplished woman, but a most good and faithful one, who loved the child, and prayed for her, and kept her true and simple.

She was not old enough during her father's lifetime to go into society, but his friends were always delighted with her, and gathered round her whenever she appeared. It seemed as if she had a peculiar charm for the professors who taught her, and for the "savans," and artists, and literary men whose society M. de Beaurepaire affected. Diane amused them. She was a great mimic, and never failed to see a joke. They called her all sorts of pretty names; she was a sunbeam, a cloud, a genius, a little pearl. "Dolly" was sometimes afraid that the child's head would be turned; but she sagely came to the conclusion that compliments so simply paid would do her no great harm.

Perhaps the artists were right, and that it was a touch of genius that kept her so fresh and childlike, yet made her 'simpatica,' as they expressed it, to all these thoughtful men. Diane loved to learn, and it pleased them to teach her. They made science into a fairy tale for her. Was it not for her entertainment that the great French professor borrowed the Romano diamonds for his celebrated "conférence" on Light, and flashed the prismatic colours of the jewels out of the darkness on to her dazzled eyes? And the quaint old

naturalist, Don Pasquale, who insisted on teaching her botany—did he not provide the loveliest flowers for her to pick to pieces in the pursuit of knowledge?

Once and once only Diane appeared at a party in her father's house at Naples. It was all wrong, and against the rules; but there were so many famous people coming whom it would be instructive for her to see, that she was allowed to come into the rooms in her little white gown, with a string of pearls round her neck. Diane enjoyed herself amazingly, and her father was amused at the notice people took of her. "La petite a beaucoup brillé," he wrote in his diary.

It was the last party he ever gave. Shortly afterwards he left Naples, and Diane never saw him again.

On the night before he went away he was sitting smoking on the balcony, and his daughter stood behind his chair, looking across the Bay.

"Dost thou know that I once tried to marry thee to a Scotchman?" said M. de Beaurepaire, taking his cigar out of his mouth and blowing a cloud of blue smoke into the air.

Diane did not answer: she was leaning over the balcony trying to catch the real Neapolitan twang of "Santa Lucia," as sung by a small shrill fisher-boy down on the Chiaja.

Then a little boat with a lateen sail came rocking and curtseying prettily across the bay from Baïe. Diane watched it flit into the path of the moon, gleam for a moment there, and then dance on into the shadow.

"Thou art not attending," said her father, turning round. "Did any one tell thee of the young Scotchman?"

"No, mon père," said Diane, properly attentive.

"But thou hast often heard of the Douglas family?"

Yes; Diane had heard very often of the Douglas family, and of Lady Beatrix Stuart, towards whom the behaviour of her grandfather, M. le Marquis Raoul de Beaurepaire, appeared to the little lady so reprehensible, that she did not care to hear it talked about. She made a little mutinous gesture and was silent.

Her father laughed. "He would have made thee a very good husband all the same, the young Douglas, but he would not have thee, Diane; and they tell me he fell in love after their fashion with his cousin."

"Yes?" Diane looked more interested.

"So there was an end of it. She is the grandchild of that 'ange de bonté,' Lady Beatrix. But I loved the young man's father very much, and if I die before thou art grown up I should like to send thee to his mother."

Diane put her hand half-shyly and half-caressingly on his arm; but he went on with his own thoughts. "She was a good woman, that mother, when I knew her—simple, frugal, domesticated"—the little face looking over his shoulder grew very long,—"and such a beautiful head." M. de Beaurepaire drew an outline in the air with his cigar. Diane brightened up again. "Thou would'st like to go to Scotland, Diane."

She shook her head. "Ah bella Napoli! Ah suol beato!" she sang softly, but with the nasal drawl of the little lazzarone well caught and reproduced with spirit. "Ah bah!" said her father, stopping his ears. "Thou shalt stay at Naples, and we will marry thee to old Don Pasquale and his caterpillars."

CHAPTER XV

DIANE

" O Nannie wilt thou gang wi' me?
Nor sigh to leave the flaunting town?
Can silent glens ha'e charms for thee,
The lonely cot, the russet gown?
No longer dress'd in silken sheen,
No longer deck'd wi' jewels rare;
Say, canst thou quit each costly scene,
Where thou were fairest o' the fair? "

Things settle themselves by degrees, or people settle them.

It seemed to require a great deal of correspondence and consultation, before the affairs of the little waif, Diane de Beaurepaire, could be satisfactorily adjusted; but at last all was properly arranged for her.

For some time after her father's death they let her remain quietly on in Italy with Mrs. Doran. Then her brother Agénor, who was paternally and amiably anxious to do everything he could for her, was allowed to go to Naples to bring her home, and was very much surprised at the motley group of people who crowded the railway station to say farewell to Diane, and at the heaps of beautiful bouquets which were showered on her from all sides, as she stood smiling and crying by turns, at the carriage window.

The brother and sister were very grave and mournful when they first met, but it would have

been unnatural that their spirits should not rise, when they were fairly on their journey. To neither of them had their father been very familiar, and his loss made no blank in their daily lives.

It was a more real sorrow to Diane that when they reached England she was to part from her faithful and well-beloved 'Dolly.' But there was a bright side even to this, for Dolly was going home to a pretty little Devonshire parsonage, there to keep house for a widower-son, and dearly as she loved Diane, her Basil and his little boy held of necessity the first place in her heart. They had been waiting impatiently for her coming for nearly a year, but Mrs. Doran could not leave her nursling in her trouble.

The two children—for in many way Agénor and Diane were little more than children—had built many castles in the air before they arrived in Paris.

"I will marry," the young fellow observed sententiously, "as soon as I am considered to have arrived at a suitable age; and thou wilt come to us, my sister, and my spouse will occupy herself with thy fate."

Anything so distant as 'her fate' held but a small place, however, in Diane's present thoughts. It was more interesting to her that General Douglas, who was to take her down to Dalbraith, was waiting to receive her in London, and that he and his charge lost their hearts to each other on the spot.

"The boy is a good creature," he wrote, describing the meeting to Lady Beatrix; "a little bit of a prig certainly, but full of proper feeling."

Concerning the girl the General was much more enthusiastic, and quoted Wordsworth—"She was a phantom of delight," he wrote, and he was at the pains to transcribe the whole passage, as a fitting

description of Diane. "Her governess," he added, "a most sensible and admirable person, assures me that she believes Diane will become a very remarkable woman. I have taken her several times to the house of your friend, Miss Montrose of Dunethar, who is a good deal struck with her."

"A line of plain prose would have pleased me better than all the General's poetry," said Grizel, whose soul was still severely exercised concerning the advent of the young stranger. She wrote off immediately to ask Miss Montrose if there was anything special that would be required to meet the wants of this formidable guest.

But she received very scanty information in return. "Do not alarm yourself," was old Miss Montrose's reply. "Get the child a piano if you like, and a pony to ride up the hills on; and buy some Scotch fingering and teach her to make stockings. But mind and don't let Margaret Douglas forget about the piano, for you will only have the half of little Diane without her music."

"It's just as I thought," observed Grizel, pursing up her lips; "good Miss Montrose would have us prepared for the poor child's never having been required to put her hand to any useful work in all her days."

"Well, we shall soon know now," said Marion. "Uncle Norman said they were to be at Edinburgh to-night."

Meanwhile Diane de Beaurepaire had set out hopefully on her journey north, with her maid and her escort, whose fatherly ways and knightly courtesy soon put her at her ease with him. Every evening she scribbled long letters full of those minute details that older people have no patience to enter into, and sent them off to gladden the heart of

'Dolly,' in her Devonshire parsonage. The one that was awaited there with the most anxiety came at last, to tell how in due time she had reached her far-away destination.

Diane described how she had been carried northward through the strange, wild, moorland country, and had come one evening to the grey old building, half castle, half dwelling-house, with its pepper-pot turrets, and its willow trees beside the defaced moat. And of the majestic and low-voiced woman in her long black dress, who had come out to welcome her.

"They say many people are afraid of her," wrote Diane. "My dear old General stopped me in the hall to tell me I must never be afraid of his poor Margaret. I do not think I should. Why should I? She has simply the most sorrowful face I ever saw. Yes, the most sorrowful,—sadder even than that old Spanish nun, Sister Dolores, in the Convent near Perugia. You said you were sure she had a broken heart. Well, Lady Douglas has just the same look, as if she had fought with grief till she was tired. And just as I was thinking of Sister Dolores, the door opened, and I began to think I must have gone to sleep and be dreaming of Santa Chiara, for there came in another lady, with an odd, kind, happy face, so like good old Mother Serafina; do you remember, Dolly? who used to make those wonderful chocolate cakes.

"And by-and-by, after we had talked a little about nothing at all, this kind old Serafina took me to my room, at the top of a queer winding stone stair-case, up which we went twisting round and round till we were giddy.

"She is Grizel Douglas, a cousin, who belongs to everybody, and lives here, and is comfortable and

good. When we got up here she kissed me, and said I was kindly welcome to Dalbraith, and that this room was the fittest for me, because it had a bonny outlook, and once in old days, it had been the lady's bower. It is a pretty old bower, for I suppose a bower means a sitting-room, and there is faded damask hung upon the walls, and some carved cabinets, and a queer japanned mirror that would enchant Maso in the Borg' ogni Santi. And in the corner there is a quaint old bed draped with damask and white muslin, like the beds in France. Grizel laughed, and said 'Ugly' had made it ready for me, because I was a Beaurepaire. I wonder who Ugly is, and whether she is very frightful.

"It was dark, and I could not see the 'bonny outlook,' but I put my hand out of the window, and gathered something that I saw glimmering in a crevice of the rough grey wall.

"It was a star-thistle, Dolly, the emblem flower of Scotland!—was not that a pretty greeting?

"When I went down-stairs again, Lady Douglas was still sitting where I had left her, with a shaded lamp beside her, so that one could not see her face; the light only fell on her thin white hands, and the book lying open on her knee.

"There was a man standing on the hearth, leaning his arm on the chimney-piece. Lady Douglas turned a little when I came up to her, and said, 'Here is Diane, Douglas. Diane, this is my son.' He came across the room to meet me, and shook my hand in a kind warm way, but he hardly spoke louder than his mother when he said, 'You are most welcome to Dalbraith.'

"He is a very tall man—wonderfully tall he looked to me, with his broad shoulders, and his head which seemed to be up above the lamp-light

in the shadow of the ceiling. I could not see his face until we came out into the dining-room where there was more light, and then do you know, Dolly, it made me sad—almost as sad as his mother's. He is dark, tanned quite brown by the African sun, and I suppose it is that, and his eyes, that make him look like one of the Savoyard boys that play the musettes in the streets—only of course my cousin is not a boy. You would be sorry for him directly you saw him. His face is full of gloom and shadow. His father has been dead many years now. How his wife and his son must have loved him!

"But, dear Dolly,"—the letter broke off abruptly —"I am sleepy, and Ugly's bed looks comfortable. Lady Douglas came up here with me just now, and stood in the doorway, looking like a picture by Velasquez. She kissed me, and said it was very quiet here, and she was afraid I might be dull. I do not think so. I should like to comfort her. Good night, my Dolly."

After her maid left her, Diane stood for a few minutes at the window, looking out into the soft whispering stillness through which she could distinguish nothing. The landscape was wrapped in the sweet mystery which is beloved by Night, and it seemed to Diane that the new life begun to-day, lay shrouded too in its dim folds. "Never mind," she said to herself, "I will get up very early to-morrow and find everything out."

And it was very early next morning when she made her way through the still silent house.

The turret-door, however, stood half open, and presently she passed out through it into the sunshine.

The wide moors, that half-seen, had so impressed her the evening before, now lay full in her view,

stretching far away, and steeped in the brief, bright sunlight of a Highland summer.

For miles on one side the broad blaze streamed down unshaded, across the expanse of moss and half-blown heather, until the blue hills met the bluer sky. But on the other side of the house, "the waving woods were dim with leafiness;" the wooded hill, cleft by the winding of the glen, looked cool and dark, and she heard the tinkle of the burn. Diane sprang towards it—"the tiny beck was a merry dancer," and her light feet kept time to its music as she went on by its side. Presently she deserted it for a steep winding path that climbed yet further into the depths of the wood. In and out it went under the trees, rising by rough steps, sometimes formed by jutting bits of the live rock, sometimes by the roots of the trees themselves. Wild roses in full bloom trailed over the path, and brushed softly across Diane's eyes; here and there a great grey-stemmed, red-branched Scotch fir glowed through a tangle of honeysuckle. The long grass and the bracken and the harebell-cups were still wet and sparkling with dew, and over her head the lavrock's note "lilted wildly up the glen." Diane grasped with both hands at the flowers that grew on each side of the path, dragging down great clusters of broom and foxglove, and softly crooning under her breath the one Scottish song she knew, the "Blue bells of Scotland."

Suddenly the loud report of a gun broke with startling effect on to the stillness. It was so close at hand that she jumped up frightened, from the wild strawberry-bed by which she had knelt down; and as another report rang noisily through the rocks and trees, she set off running, scattering her flowers wildly round her as she flew along the path.

It began to descend now in steep, sharp, short-cuts through the wood. The brawling of the burn sounded straight beneath, and Diane found it very difficult to check herself in her quick downward run.

Slipping on the polished fern-stems, jumping from rock to rock, catching at the branches of sweetbrier that broke off in her hands, she felt herself rushing helplessly down to the rocks and the water, when a man who was standing on the edge of the rock looking down into the burn, turned suddenly, and making a couple of long strides caught her outstretched hands as she came towards him. "Oh!" gasped Diane, coming to a standstill, with one final scramble and slip over a mossy fallen branch, and looking up with wide open eyes into Lord Douglas's face—"how very odd!"

"You ought not to run down the side of a Highland glen like that," he said with a smile, as she grasped his arm with both hands to steady herself.

"It was the gun—I could not stop myself."

"Old Duncan has got hold of a rabbit, I expect," said Lord Douglas; but Diane took no notice. She had forgotten him, the gun, the rabbit, all the world for the moment; for just here the trees thinned and scattered, and through an arch of leafage formed by the branches of two great cedars, the blue loch glanced on them in the sun.

"How very, very beautiful that is!" said Diane, after a pause.

"Do you know you are trembling all over? Sit down on this rock. What a fright you must have had."

"I was not frightened one bit, and my legs only tremble from jumping down so fast," said Diane, turning round half-indignantly. Her eyes were full

of sunshine and laughter, her cheeks flushed like the briar-roses that dangled over her head. It was an almost dazzling vision of youth and brightness—a very incarnation of the summer's morning, that had seemed to rise up suddenly, or rather perhaps to fall down from the sky, at Ronald's side. He looked at her for a minute or two gravely, and then some of the laughter from her sunny eyes passed into his own.

"I see I must teach you to climb our hills," he said.

"What a beginning for me!" said Diane; "I only just meant to come out for one moment, just to look at the little river before breakfast."

"Ah, breakfast," he said, looking at his watch, and then holding out his hand to help her down from the rock on which she had perched herself, her little feet, steeped in dew and green with moss, dangling crossed before her. "My mother and Grizel will be hunting high and low for you."

"Let us run," exclaimed Diane, jumping down, and beginning zealously to climb the hill-side. Holding her hand still to steady her, and giving quiet answers to her merry talk, the two went back through the glen.

That morning the breakfast at Dalbraith was much less silent than usual. The presence of another person in itself relieved the odd constraint which prevailed between the mother and son, and which Grizel was not enough of a stranger to dispel. Grizel for her part was finding her prejudices give way on every side. It was impossible to resist the pleasure of watching this pretty young face, and she sat smiling broadly as the clear sweet voice went on talking fearlessly to one after the other. Diane presently began to recount the vicissitudes of her

first walk. "There I was, stumbling, and jumping, and scratching among the brambles and nettles," she said, with a rueful face.

"You must have gotten a great fright," observed Grizel.

"Ah," the girl went on gaily, "you see I was afraid that Lord Douglas was out with his gun, and that he would not see me in the wood, and might shoot me by accident—"

Diane stopped short. She had been looking towards Grizel as she spoke, and saw her glance suddenly at Lady Douglas, and then hold up her hand as if in warning. The story of the house flashed across Diane before the words were well out of her mouth. It was all she could do to keep from bursting into a fit of tears. She could not look at Douglas, but she felt that he too turned his eyes towards his mother, and began hastily some sentence that he did not finish.

There was a dreadful moment of silence which Grizel broke by saying, with an awkward attempt at a laugh, "Guns are terribly risky things." And then Douglas looked up and made a sign to her not to speak. "Mother," he said quickly, "you must take Diane to see Granny to-day. You know all about Lady Beatrix," he continued, turning to Diane. "She will be so very much interested in seeing you." He was looking full at her with a kind smile, as if he wanted to make up to her for the pain she must have given to herself. Diane could not respond. Her cheeks burnt like fire, and she felt sure that if she raised her eyelids the imprisoned tears would roll down her face.

It hardly comforted her to hear Lady Douglas answer her son in her usual low tone, and she wished that Grizel had not gone to Douglas and patted him

on the arm as if to console him. Ronald shook off her hand rather hastily, but the next moment he caught it in his own, and Diane had an intuitive perception that he was saving her from being the next to be patted and soothed and thoroughly upset by Grizel's good intentions.

Lady Douglas by this time had left the room, and Diane went into one of the recessed windows of the hall, where she stood looking out, seeing nothing, but feeling the hot flush mount to her cheeks at every fresh remembrance of her unlucky speech, and suffering such acute biting pain as only very young people experience at such a moment.

"Cruel, heartless, horrible!" she said to herself. "What can I do? Oh, how I wish I had never said it!"

Just then Douglas came into the hall by himself, and walked hastily across to where she was standing. Diane turned away her head, for the two big tears had found their way on to her cheeks by this time, but he did not even pretend not to see them.

"Diane," he began quickly, "I see what you are thinking of, and I have come to say that I know it was a horrid bore for you; but you must not think about it any more. Please don't."

Diane tried to thank him, but choked.

"It would not have mattered a bit if it had not been for Grizzy," he continued, very ungratefully. "It was her fault. But she always does say unlucky things, poor dear old Grizzy. Nobody minds her."

"It wasn't her," said Diane, between two sobs. "It was me."

"Well. But indeed you mustn't mind. My mother did not, I assure you. Besides, how could you tell?"

Diane felt that she was making the thing worse by seeming to attach so much importance to this, and she tried hard to recover herself, and to smile in answer to Ronald's kind, anxious look."

"It is very good of you to forgive me," she said; "but to say that thing—to remind you—" And then she stopped short again, and coloured deeply.

But he was not looked at her this time. He was leaning out of the window. "As for that," he said presently, in an altered voice, "it is not as if one needed to be reminded—as if we ever forgot—either my mother or I. This place is enough. I can never stand it long. Diane, it is terrible."

Diane had quite forgotten herself, her unlucky speech, her misery of a few moments before; all but the sudden confidence reposed in her; all but Ronald's suppressed voice and concentrated look.

"Oh, it must be terrible," she said, looking up at him with her eyes brimming, and her lips quivering. He said no more, only stared out of the window; then suddenly recovering himself with a deep sigh, he stood upright, and said to Diane, "Would you like to come out? We don't get such weather as this every day up here."

She ran to get her hat. Their talk changed to every-day subjects. But the ice thus roughly broken never froze again, and both felt as they went down the steps into the sunshine, that a sudden unaccountable intimacy had sprung up between them.

There were many dogs waiting round the door as they came out, in eager expectation of Ronald's advent. Dalbraith was a great house for dogs. A smart little Dandie Dinmont terrier superintended Grizel's existence, and hardly let her out of his sight from morning till night. Ronald was in the habit of bringing outlandish dogs home from all his travels.

And here near the house-door, a very old deer-hound was generally to be found, half-blind and nearly stone-deaf, who had been a puppy in the late Lord Douglas's lifetime, and was now the only dog about the place who had known him. For this reason everybody petted the old dog, and spoke kindly to him as he lay basking in the sun on fine days, or sleeping in winter before the hall fire. He used just to wink his dim, kindly eyes, and stir his tail, as if he wished them all well, but was really too old and tired to take much trouble about them. Only if Lady Douglas passed him, he would rise stiffly and follow her across the threshold, parting from her with a deep broken bow-wow, which seemed to shake his lean old frame to its foundations.

Very different was the vehement and half-educated collie pup who now proceeded to favour Diane uninvited with his passionate, ill-regulated regard. Hitherto his affections had been a burden to him—no one wanted them. He had only lately been brought down from a sheep-farm in the hills, because he gave promise of great beauty, but it was all promise as yet and no fulfilment.

He felt that. He was aware of being " flopperty " and unfinished. He fawned awkwardly on people and fell at their feet while soliciting their friendship, so that every one tripped over him. Poor fellow! he missed the shepherd's children who used to carry him by the tail, and drop him about on the heather; and he missed the feeble growls of his brothers and sisters. Here he had not even a name, but was only " that there new collie pup."

In vain he tried to force his company on Grizel and the Dandie Dinmont. Pepper became all eyes and teeth and pointed tail in an instant. In vain he offered to join the cohort of Ronald's followers;

he knew it was only on sufferance that he was permitted to canter heavily along—among them but not of them.

And yet he had known affection. Little Jamie McKillop, up yonder in the glen, had taught him to give a paw, had cuffed him and loved him, and rolled over and over with him in the straw, and on his last night at home the pup's black satin coat had been stained by Jamie's tears.

He was almost past puppyhood when Diane came to Dalbraith, but was still ungainly in person, and solitary as regarded his best feelings. Ronald was good natured to him, but indifferent, and as often as not declined the paw which it was the collie's one idea to offer those whose good opinion he so ardently coveted. "Paws off, Gawky," was the general response to his advances, and Gawky was often left sitting with his uplifted leg, wondering blankly wherein his mistake had lain.

Diane's arrival roused him into a tumult of frenzied hope. Here was some one whom no dog as yet seemed to own as his exclusive property. Not a moment was to be lost in putting in his claim. Up went Gawky's paw at minute intervals, as he sat anxiously on the floor in front of her. Diane shook it civilly many times, but scarcely knew what to make of him. He was in waiting by daybreak on her first morning, and followed her out walking with as matter of course an air as he could assume, though he knew that it imposed on none of the other dogs.

When she went up to her own room, Diane heard a heavy, rapid scuffling behind her on the stair, and presently a loud regular thumping noise against her open door. It was poor Gawky's tail. He stood on the threshold, an embodied question—head raised sideways, wistful eyes, one foot timidly advanced,

" May I come in? " expressed plainly in every hair of his glossy coat.

" Oh yes; come in if you like," Diane answered.

In a second with one great glad bound he was across the room, careering wildly round it, snuffing, leaping, shaking himself, taking proud possession of the kingdom he had won. Finally he sat down in a patch of sunshine before the window, panting, staring, smiling, with the joy of a hope fulfilled, in his great brown, pathetic, watery eyes.

" You good, dear, kind, ridiculous dog," said Diane at last, sitting down on the floor beside him and kissing both his tan cheeks. And after that there was not a word more to be said. Gawky belonged to Diane, heart and paw, body, life, and mind.

Gawky's was not the only heart that she had already won.

" Marion, my dear," said Grizel, hurrying quite out of breath into the morning-room of the Lady's Lodge, " she is coming. I stepped on to tell you, and to prepare Granny. I knew she had been uneasy; but she may set her mind at rest. She is a little gem. Talk of fine ladies! "—with scorn; " she's just as innocent and honest a child as you could wish to see, and as for being French, why she speaks the English tongue with as pure an accent as my own. Granny, you will feel at home with her directly. Margaret is now bringing her."

They all thought it would move Lady Beatrix somewhat to meet this girl, the grandchild of the old lover of her youth. Granny herself was a little bit excited in her quiet way, and lately she had talked much to General Douglas and to Marion of her early days, recalling old stories that her granddaughter well remembered hearing as a child,

when she and Kenneth could conceive no greater pleasure than to coax Granny into telling them all the naughty things she used to do as a little French girl. There was a bright pink spot on each of her soft cheeks, as she came forward now to welcome her visitor. She took both Diane's hands in hers, and kissed her, and then she looked straight into the girl's eyes. Did some vision of those long past days come back to her just then?

When Diane had been called away to speak to Marion, Lady Beatrix looked up to Margaret, answering some unspoken question with a little tender laugh. "My dear, you can't think how long it all seems ago."

"Thank God," said Lady Douglas wearily, "for the wearing out of any sorrow;" and Granny took her hand.

"Nay, my dear; rather thank God for a quiet heart, and for the light that comes in the evening."

From the first day of their meeting Ronald's mother had taken a strong hold on Diane's imagination. She could not help watching the pale woman, who had the sternness of a fixed and solitary sorrow in her face. There was something striking and tragic in her tall figure, and slow gliding step, her long white hands, and in the voice which must once have been so often choked by tears, that it had sunk beneath its natural key. And her manner to her son puzzled Diane, as indeed did his to her. On his side a courtesy, a sort of measured civility that it was painful and unnatural to watch (especially as Diane felt instinctively how far from formal was his natural manner)—on her side, a weary coldness and distance, that might either have caused, or been caused by, his ways with her.

And yet by-and-bye Diane, quietly watching with her quick eyes, began dimly to discern what at first she had entirely failed to see,—that Lord Douglas at least loved his mother. She was not so soon certain about her. Sometimes her eyes rested with a look—was it of wistfulness? on his face. Sometimes she seemed to be listening for his voice; once or twice when Grizel spoke of him with loving praise, a slight smile, like a glint of winter sunshine, just stirred her lips. That was all.

But of the son's feelings Diane had but little doubt, man of few words as he was. She knew them by his voice, by his eyes, by an indescribable ripple of feeling that passed over his face when she spoke to him in her cold voice, or seemed to shrink back from him.

Gathering up, little by little, and by slow degrees, the history of the household, the girl grew to understand what at first had only thrilled her with a vague sympathy.

Grizel and she became great friends; one was never tired of telling—the other of hearing the fateful story of the past. It might perhaps have been more intelligible if Grizel could have made up her mind to allow that any one had ever been to blame. But such treason to her creed she was quite incapable of, and she was ready to quarrel seriously with Diane if by a chance word or look, or even gesture, she implied a shadow of disapproval. "Was it not most natural that Margaret should shrink back when she could never see her son without remembering everything? Who could expect it to be otherwise?"

"Ah, child," she would add, "you never knew my cousin, the good Lord Douglas; you never saw poor Margaret in her blithe days. You never

witnessed that all-absorbing love,—how can you understand?" Then a moment afterwards: "It was a sore misfortune, the blow that crushed this house, but it was no fault of Ronald's. Who would have the heart to think any but pitiful thoughts of the poor laddie?—or who can wonder that the sorrow and the coldness drove him away from home, and led him (I can't deny it) into ways that he should never have taken. But, Diane, never throw a stone at Ronald. You cannot guess what his young life has been."

And Diane listened, spell-bound, to the first romance in real life that had ever crossed her path. She brooded over it, acting over again in her fancy the scenes she heard described, till her heart was filled with a great longing to console. Sometimes she went up to Lady Douglas and silently kissed her hand. Margaret looked at her, half surprised, at first. But in a little while she smiled at the young earnest face, and sometimes held the girl's hand caressingly for a moment. She was beginning to feel that a sunbeam had slipped unawares into the old house.

Coming home from the hills towards dusk one evening, Ronald was met in the hall by Grizel, who was in a wonderful commotion of excitement. "Whist, my dear. Do not make a sound—you might stop her. Hearken, Ronald,—did you ever hear anything so sweet? Your mother is listening. Step softly. This way, Ronald. You shall see your dear mother listening, she hasn't stirred for half-an-hour. She likes it. I know she does. Hush!" and she motioned to him to stand in the shadow of the door-way, and to look in.

Lady Douglas sat in an attitude of intense listening, and Diane was singing to her.

No one but those who had witnessed the joylessness of those long years, could have understood Grizel's emotion. She could have knelt to kiss the feet of this young girl, who had brought the first ray of peaceful pleasure into the darkened life. Ronald himself stood looking in, and listening with an odd, keen thrill of mingled feelings. Quite unconscious of the good cousin's agitation, Diane went on singing, in the twilight, one thing after another—now and then stopping to think what should come next, and playing a few dreamy bars and chords, then breaking again into one of the songs she loved—'people's songs' generally; wistful German ballads, or 'canti popolari' picked up by ear from the fishermen and cab-drivers of Naples or Florence—quaint sunshiny music, that brought with it the thought of vineyards and olive-groves.

Grizel exulted in their careless gaiety. In her young days songs used to be all about moonlight and despair, and told only of the sorrow or the inconstancy of lovers. Diane's heroes fell in love too, but they were homely and practical fellows—they ate 'polenta,' and went to market, and made themselves smart for the festa, that their little Bianchinas and Morettinas might admire them as they passed singing under the windows, down the sunny road.

Old Miss Montrose was right in telling them that they would only have the half of Diane without her music. It grew to be a custom that she should sing every evening in the gloaming, and often too at other times.

Soon she caught up the pathetic old Scottish airs, and once more the braes and glens round Dalbraith, echoed to long-forgotten passionate entreaties that 'bonnie Charlie' would come back to his own.

It was but as the worship of a dead faith. No one cared or remembered. The people that she passed smiled at the bit lassie with her blithesome voice, but the 'cause' lived no longer in their hearts. Only Lady Beatrix's face brightened at the once familiar strains, and the minister, Angus Maclean, pricked up his ears when the saucy voice sent the words ringing to his ears:

> "Come o'er the stream, Charlie, brave Charlie, dear Charlie,
> Come o'er the stream, Charlie, and dine wi' Maclean."

"'Tis a grand gift," said the good man to General Douglas, after listening in silence for half-an-hour; "'tis a grand gift, yon gift of song."

"Yes," answered the General. "The little maid has a rare voice, and sings well for so young a creature. But she has had a serious musical education in Italy."

In his secret heart he thought Diane's voice the loveliest thing that had ever been heard, but in virtue of his prior acquaintance with her in London, the General had put on a quaint deprecating air of ownership, accepting all praises of her modestly, as if they were compliments paid to a curious work of art, which he had produced himself. "Yes, I am glad you are pleased. I felt convinced you would think as I did. Of course she is very young, and we must not look for too much at her time of life; but still, yes—well, my dear Margaret, I own I agree with you. I think there is a charm. I believe I mentioned that old Miss Montrose pronounced her to be full of talent and power."

"Poor child!" said Lady Douglas, "one wonders what her future life will be."

General Douglas was delighted. It was long, as he said afterwards to Marion, since poor Margaret

had been roused to even so slight an expression of interest in outward things.

"Mark my words, Marion," he said, "God has sent this young thing to us with a blessing in her hand."

There was no one who rejoiced more ungrudgingly than did Marion, that the tasks she had once hoped to fulfil, should pass now into the hands of another. It was not only circumstances, she said to herself humbly, that had taken the power away from her; here was one who was far fitter for such work. She remembered how, from very reverence for her great sorrow, she used to approach Lady Douglas in fear and awe. There was ever a constraint between them, but Diane seemed to have no fears; she went on her way with a singular straightforward simplicity, never thinking of herself.

Perhaps the difference between the two girls lay in this, that whereas Marion was full of an earnest longing after self-sacrifice, Diane never thought about it, but lived for others just simply for the joy it gave her, and for the love she bore them.

Which was the highest? Diane's unconscious motto was Love and Joy. Marion's, Duty and Self-denial

CHAPTER XVI

CROSSING THE FORD

" He pu'd me the cranberry ripe frae the boggy en;
He pu'd me the strawberry red frae the foggy glen;
He pu'd me the rowan frae the wild steep sae giddy, O,
Sae loving and kind was my dear Hieland laddie, O."

Kenneth Douglas had been spending his furlough in shooting tigers in the valley of Dehra Doon, much to his satisfaction. He ended the expedition, however, by catching a jungle fever, of which he lay for some time dangerously ill. As soon as he was sufficiently recovered to be moved, Sir Charles Stuart was resolved to send him home on sick-leave to Scotland.

He had passed an anxious time of it while his kinsman and aide-de-camp struggled through the crisis of his illness. " That's the worst," he grumbled, " of having relations on one's staff; you never have a day's peace, but are forced to be for ever thinking of their fathers, or their grandfathers, or the girls they want to marry. I never will be caught doing such a thing again. Now there's Norman Douglas would have been terribly cut up if this lad had died, not to mention Marion, unless, by-the-by, she has changed her mind a second time."

" Are you and Marion engaged now, may I be allowed to inquire? " he asked abruptly, stopping after he had bidden the homeward-bound invalid farewell on the day of his departure.

"In a sort of a way we are," answered Kenneth, looking up rather anxiously.

"I hate your 'sort of ways.' What is it you mean? Let us know where we are, one way or another. Has she refused you?"

"No," replied Kenneth with a half-smile.

"Then she has accepted you, I presume?"

"She will, I hope, when I see her again."

"I thought she had thrown over Douglas for your sake. I don't pretend to make the whole story out, and it seems to me that both you and she behaved as ill as possible, but I certainly believed you had come to an understanding."

"Marion behaved splendidly," said Kenneth, "and of course we understand each other."

"Oh, you do? then are you going to be married, I should like to know?"

"Do you give your consent?" asked Kenneth eagerly, in return.

"I wash my hands of it all, as I told you before. I can't attempt to look after Marion at this distance. Her grandmother and your father must do as they see fit. The last time I was at home they plagued me out of my life for my consent, and then directly I had been badgered into giving it, they wrote to tell me it was not wanted. The whole thing is a mystery to me. They may do without my consent this time."

Kenneth pondered a little.

"I tell you fairly, Sir Charles, that I know Marion likes me, but I am not so sure that she will marry me. I can't stand the suspense of it all. It is the one thing I am going home to find out."

"You are going home because you have had a fever, as I understand it," said Sir Charles sharply. "What follies you may commit when you get there

is no business of mine. I have no doubt you will go your own way in spite of my advice. Well, good-bye to you," and so saying he shook hands with the young man once more, and left him.

He had grown rather fond of his aide-de-camp, who was a good officer and devoted to the scientific part of his profession. They did not become intimate—it was not Sir Charles's way. Never was there a less domestic man, or one who had smaller need of wife and child. That a soldier had no business with such luxuries, was one of his unalterable maxims, and it was with more than contentment that he left Marion to her grandmother's guardianship. However, his sense of duty was strong, and when he was on the spot, he had done his best to keep her from a hasty marriage, which was the more to his credit as he secretly dreaded the day when the charge of his daughter might be thrown into his hands. The event had proved his wisdom. That engagement soon came to an end, and it now appeared that Kenneth was the man she liked. Well, selfishly speaking, he should not be sorry to know that the child had a home and a husband of her own. The idea just softened the asperity with which he would otherwise have contemplated his aide-de-camp's spoiling his military prospects, by any such mistaken step.

Kenneth reappeared in England after an absence of two and a half years; six months or so after Diane de Beaurepaire came to Dalbraith. Time had not been standing still for any of them, though just now it moved with light and swift footsteps, as if not caring that people should mark the silent changes it was working as it stole along. There are seasons when no one wishes to question what a day may bring forth. Kenneth and Marion fell

insensibly into the spirit of the hour, enjoying the strange consciousness of being together, and of belonging to each other, without trying for the moment to look far into the future. Indeed Kenneth hardly dared to speak of it to her, and she was glad to wait.

It was, perhaps, the same with others. New ways and new customs had slipped in very quietly and naturally. Perhaps only to someone who was able to look back and compare the past time with the present, would it be possible to realize how "the old order changeth, yeilding place to new."

The name of Diane, a new one to Kenneth except in letters, was on the lips of all as a household word. There was nothing strange now to the dwellers at Dalbraith in the sound of a light footstep running up and down the stair—in a little burst of happy laughter, or a scrap of song floating out of the old rooms. Douglas had grown used to looking round for her whenever he came in. He at least knew what a difference it made to know that he might find her curled up daintily in one of the deep recesses of the window, with Gawky at her feet, and a book in her hand, or else buried in the mazes of her Italian needlework.

They were constantly together. Grizel, cumbered with much serving, left "Nanie" (as she Scotticized the girl's French name) for many hours to her own devices. It had soon become a custom that Ronald should take her with him to the hill-side or the river. Sometimes he walked beside her shaggy pony. Sometimes he let her climb steep craigs where, he assured her, only the goats and a few herd boys had ever been before her. Often a plaid was spread for her on the warm heather under some friendly rock, and the caller air laden

with the scent of wild thyme and bog myrtle blew softly round her, and it would all have seemed too like Paradise, she said, if it had not been for the midges.

Little bare-footed, rough-haired children often gathered round her, attracted by her gestures and sunshiny smiles. She made them understand her somehow, though they could speak nothing but Gaelic; but children have an universal language of their own, Douglas told her—and what was she but a child? She had all a child's love for listening to stories, and Douglas ransacked his memory for tales of the Fairy glen, and for all the marvelloous legends which Grizel used to tell him when he was a boy. He even took Diane to visit old Luckie Rintoul, the Sybil of the village, whom some people affirmed to be a witch. There he found her one day, half-scared, half-pleased, sitting in the smoke, over the fire in the middle of the hut, while the old woman repeated to her the prophecy that used to be called the Doom of Dalbraith. Luckie "had the English," and had been down south to Glasgow once, but Ronald looked rather vexed when he heard the old words that had once made him so uncomfortable slowly and clearly rehearsed for Diane's benefit. The red hand, the kinsman's blood, the lassie from the East—what queer memories it brought back.

"Do not speak of that prophecy to Grizel," he said to Diane, in a constrained voice, "she would not like it."

"Does she know it? does she believe it?" asked Diane eagerly.

"She used."

"But why does she dislike it?" persisted Diane; "what can it all mean?"

"I am the one son of the good father," answered Douglas, after a minute's hesitation; "and you know, Diane, how my hand is dyed."

"Douglas!" she exclaimed; and then she stopped short.

In those days he told her almost the whole story of his life. A silent reticent man, used to solitude, and very chary of his words, he yielded now without question to the charm that led him on. Even in his best days with Marion, he said little, and had never spoken about himself except by a great effort. He had turned to her deliberately, hoping to find happiness and rest, but from Diane he could not keep himself away. He might have thought that such a child as she was, could understand but little of a strong man's life, but in fact he never reasoned about it. He only knew that she was Diane. It was an overpowering feeling that could move away the stone, under the seal of which he had kept the spring of emotion so long imprisoned by an iron force, but when her hand smote the rock the water streamed out.

He took her one day to the island in the loch, cypress-shaded and rock-bound, which was the old burial-place of his family. There, within the ruined walls of an old chapelry, was his father's grave—and the grave of his own boyhood. There they had brought him—the good Lord Douglas—on a summer's day, with coronachs and dirges, and the sound of slow-dipped oars, and had laid him to rest in a fair place, beside his fathers. And his young son leaving him there, went away to take up the burden of a spoiled life. Diane might be a child, but she understood all this as no one in the world had ever understood it before, and Ronald knew that.

A month or two after this he moored the boat one evening under the shadow of a wooded hill, and asked Diane to come on shore with him. Hardly speaking he led the way up a winding path, and through a copse of birch-wood. Then he turned, and took her hand, leading her to where, on the borders of the wood, there was a carpet of red heather, and a tangle of fern, and a drooping rowan-tree. He stood still. Diane trembled—she knew instinctively where she was. There was a roughly-piled cairn beneath the trees just where Lord Douglas had fallen. Such a sun-shiny, peaceful spot, with the dun moor rising up beyond! He bared his head, and Diane sank upon her knees.

After a time he said in a hushed voice, "I have never been here with a living soul before, but I wanted to bring you once, and I wish you to throw a stone upon the cairn."

She obeyed. The scene rose vividly before her eyes—the trampled heather, the dying father, the boy's white face, the rough, weeping men. It was a sadder place by far than the island burying-ground. None of the country people ever passed near, without adding a stone to the grey memorial pile. It was to them a sacred spot, like what one of their way-side chapels is to a Tyrolese. Few came near it now; the lower stones of the cairn were overgrown with moss.

Diane attempted no words. Common-place sympathy would have jarred upon them both; she knew that in bringing her here he had admitted her into the inner sanctuary of his thoughts. By-and-by she rose from her knees, and stepping softly, went to gather a drooping scarlet-berried branch from the rowan-tree. He broke one off, and put it silently into her hand. It seemed strange to neither

of them when that evening, almost for the first time, he poured out his heart in vehement words.

"Diane, did you ever think what it was to lose one's happiness at sixteen? I am not going to say I never had another happy moment. I have heard people say comfortably that if so and so happened they should never be happy again. Do you suppose they at all realize what they say? Life is long—long; if it is to be all pain it becomes a serious business. But I tell you there have been moments in my life when I have forgotten everything, and been causelessly, madly happy. The wear and the gnaw all ceased for the time. Good heavens, what that was! But I don't suppose since that day I have had an hour of commonplace, every-day ease. No, no; it was burnt into me—branded in with a hot iron—not the act itself, but its results. I learnt then, how in this random world one must judge and be judged by consequences; how it is not always sin, but misfortune too, that can stand like an angel with a flaming sword at the gate of one's Paradise. God knows!—if suffering could have condoned one miserable deed, if having one's youth seared and scarred and ruined would have availed anything, I could have stood free before God and man once more.

"But I am talking nonsense; only you are patient, Diane. What is done is done—only never visit those whom God has stricken, too heavily. I think He knows what can be borne, and all that goes beyond, is evil and against His will.

"I believe I could have outlived the sharp agony of that time. God knows how unwittingly I caused my dear father's death—and he knows. I never doubted that from the Heaven where my hand had sent him, he looked down on me and pitied

me. But my mother, my poor mother!—Never think I blame her; it was all natural; only it ruined me. The grief that turned her against me, and her horror, drove me wild. Poor mother, how she loved him! How she hated grief, and fought against it, and turned in her heart against me, poor wretch, who had forced it on to her! She might have saved me then. When I remember what it was to see her shrink away, I sometimes think she has almost been avenged. But, Diane," and he passed his hands over his eyes, "I never meant to speak like this. I don't know what I have been saying. Don't look at me with that pitying little face. Remember, I don't blame my mother. Even if I have seemed to do so in words, I do not in my heart. Don't let us talk of this again."

And he never did. It was the one outburst of a long pent-up bitterness, but his was not a nature to be relieved by oft-repeated complaints. Diane herself, from the calmness of every-day life, grew to look back upon those vehement, broken sentences almost like a dream. She used to look round sometimes. There seemed to be no tragic elements among those quiet people, whose evening gatherings two or three at least, out of the five assembled, enjoyed so much. There was the open piano with her music tumbling about. Grizel, spectacles on nose, nodding over her "seam." Lady Douglas absently beating time with her slender hand to the music, or else reading in her accustomed corner. The General with his legs crossed rustling the newspaper. Douglas leaning his chin on his hand, his eyes fixed on the chessboard, at the opposite side of which she herself would be sitting.

Diane, it must be confessed, lost her temper terribly over those games of chess. It was a bad

trait in her character that she could not bear to be beaten, and her antagonist, well aware of this, never allowed her to win a single game.

All this time Douglas did not for a moment forget the fact, that he was in some sort the guardian of this girl, and that he had given his word never to let her marry a man who had been a gambler. He began to talk vaguely of going abroad again. But he lingered. He might surely stand in this soft sunshine a little longer, and then he would take his shadow out of her path, and go his way.

She would be sorry for a time to lose her friend, but life must have some great prize in store for such an one as she was, and it would not harm her to have been the one unconscious star of a dark life.

She need not even know that it was a real parting, when he left her.

"Do not sing that, Diane," he said to her one evening, coming up to the piano, "I do not like it."

She paused, and looked at him with widely-opened eyes. "Not like it! Why it is Schubert's *Addio*," she answered, in a shocked voice.

"That may be. I don't care for '*Addios*,' nor for any 'lilt of dule and sorrow.' Sing one of your heartless little Swabian songs, about blowing the horn and being lustly hunters."

She lifted her eyebrows, and broke out saucily into a lively German air, to which he nodded approbation, until it fell into the minor key, and ended with '*Adè, Adè, ja scheiden und meiden thut weh.*'

"There you are again. I won't have it," and he put his finger under her wrist, and lifted it up.

"Nanie," called out Grizel, "sing that pretty song again, that sounds like 'Begone, dull care,' with a wail at the end."

Diane triumphantly complied. Douglas remained leaning over the piano.

"I don't like farewells," he said, when she had sung it through a second time to the last verse. "They are too melancholy. My notion is that friends who have cared about each other ought to part, if part they must, silently, without last looks and speeches, trusting one another."

"I should not like that," said Diane, striking one or two soft chords and looking down.

"Some partings are hard," Ronald went on; "at least one of the two friends ought to be saved from knowing it is the last look. I remember hearing, or reading, of two men who had been thrown together for a while in India, and who had grown to love each other well. But the time came when their paths in life fell asunder again, and they had to part. Each was bound to his work. One had to go on his way up the country, and the other, who had travelled with him for a part of his journey, was obliged to turn back to his post. One was a Frenchman, and the other an Englishman. For a few days more they journeyed on together, and at night pitched their tents side by side, but they knew that the parting was coming. And then, one morning, the Frenchman got up very early, and looked out of his door, but the other tent had disappeared. Silently, in the night his friend had gone his way, taking the pain of the leave-taking on himself."

"Did they ever meet again?" asked Diane, in a low voice.

"Who knows?" answered Douglas. "Very likely not; the story ends there. Will you sing us one more song before you go to bed?"

The weather in September was very rough and

stormy; wind and clouds and driving mist being the order of the day, and only now and then the sun shone out in streams of rainy gold. Diane was growing almost as hardy as Marion. Dressed in her short red petticoat and plaid, she was sublimely indifferent to wind and weather, rather exulting in a rough buffeting from the autumn gales.

One day, which had promised fairer weather than usual, the two girls went a long way up the hills with Douglas and the General. An old shepherd was lying sick in his hut on the mountain-side, and wanted so see Ronald or his uncle. He was an old friend of Marion's, and when Diane found they were all going, she begged pathetically not to be left behind.

Before they started Douglas was in his mother's room, settling some business with her. In the course of it he said something about going abroad.

"You do not surely think of going abroad again?" she asked.

"Indeed I think of it," he said.

"In that case, you are very wrong."

"Why, mother?"

For once she hesitated, looking down and twisting her handkerchief nervously round her wrist. Then she looked at him steadily, and said, "Because I have a hope that this may be the beginning of a new era in your life."

"Will you tell me what you mean?" he asked in a low voice.

"I think you guess."

"If so, will you put my guess into words for me?"

He stood in the window, with his head half turned away from her. They never wasted words in their intercourse, this mother and son. She only answered him now by one word, and that word, a name,

He could not hear it unmoved, and though he did not change his attitude she saw the colour deepen slowly in his face.

"Well, mother, what of Diane?" he asked, his voice just stopping and softening over the name.

"What of Diane?" she repeated. "I don't think there can be much need for you to ask. But if you don't wish to discuss this subject with me, tell me so plainly, and I will say no more. I do not want to force your confidence."

"I only wish that we should understand each other, and so I beg you to tell me what you mean."

"Just this, then. That I look on her as your hope for a new life, as the great and marvellous blessing that God has in His mercy put within your reach."

She spoke quickly and eagerly, with an energy that was quite unlike herself; the colour came all over her face, but it had time to ebb away again before she heard Ronald's low steady voice in answer.

"Mother, I have no right to think of her like that."

"No right?" she got up hastily and put her hand on his arm. "No right, Douglas!"

"No, none."

"And yet I am sure you love her."

She did not need any answer besides the quick involuntary one that she read plainly enough in his face, and he gave her no other.

"But, Douglas," she said, resuming her quiet manner, "I must ask you to give me an explanation, for Diane's sake."

"Most willingly," he answered sadly, "for Diane's sake." He sighed. "I did hope that you would not want all these explanations. You cannot have forgotten."

"Forgotten what?"

"The letter I wrote to you from Genoa after her father died."

She started. "I hardly see what we have to do with that just now."

"Do not you? I wish I did not see."

She stood thinking, and then said: "It was not quite honest of me to say that. I believe I do know how you think it affects us now, but," hesitating, "I do not think it should—I do not think it need."

"And yet I gave you his message, and his charge."

"Yes."

"And do you think, honestly, mother, that in his eyes, and by the standard he set up, I should have a right to marry Diane?"

"But you are changed; it was long ago; you are different, and I—"

"I said by his standard, not by yours."

She sat down and covered her face with her hands. Several minutes passed, and then he said, "I am waiting for your sentence."

Lady Douglas looked up. "I *cannot* say that in that sense you have a right to ask her."

He gave a short half laugh. "I knew that," he said, turning away.

The tears were standing in her eyes; her face worked and her hands shook. She looked as if in those few minutes she had been through an exhausting struggle. He saw it, and coming back, took her hand and put it gently to his lips. "It is no fault of yours, mother. Long ago I sentenced and condemned myself."

"You are not a gambler."

"I know that; I could trust myself; and if I had seen her at that time, nothing on earth should have induced me to give such a promise; but he

was dying, and I could not cross him; it did not seem to matter much—and all things go against one sometimes."

It was years since the mother and son had seemed so near together. She was still holding his hand; suddenly she drew it hurriedly away.

"But Diane, Douglas; have you no thought all this time for her? Has it never struck you that this falls most cruelly on her?"

"How, cruelly? She need never know of this;" but he grew quite pale.

"Have you not been for ever with her since she came? Did you ever keep away from her? Poor child, poor little Diane! how was she to guess that there was a gulf between you, that you did not mean to cross? Have you been so blind and so selfish? Have you never watched her face, and seen—oh, how glad I have been so see it!—how bitterly sorry I am now."

"Mother," his voice sank to a whisper, "I give you my solemn word I never dreamt of harm to her."

"I dare say not," she answered a little more quietly. "I believe men seldom think. I dare say it may have been ignorance on your part; but some times ignorance is very cruel."

He made no answer. Another voice was ringing in his ears, carrying with it such an agony of love, of hopeless longing, of remorse, unwilling joy and tender pity, that it made him deaf to any outward sound.

It was absolutely true that he had believed a good woman's love was a thing beyond his power to gain. His experience had been very bitter. He had forfeited, to all appearance, his mother's affection; Marion had turned away from him to Kenneth; he had become used to loneliness; it had

never seemed possible that the love of this woman, who was to him above all women, should be granted to him. But he knew now that it was so; it flashed upon him with a swift conviction—and it behoved him to put away from him for a time all the pain, all the longing, the knowledge brought to himself, and to think only of what was best for her.

"Mother," he said at last, "if you are right in this, you cannot speak of me too harshly; but tell me only what I had better do for her." He paused, then went on, as if he was lifted quite out of himself and his reserve, so that he scarcely knew whom he was addressing. "When I found out, long ago, what she was to me, I only thought of her as fenced in and hedged safely from me by her father's wishes. It was a misfortune; but when I acknowledged to myself that I must not hope to win her, I knew at the same time that my love was given past recall, and I was content (though I see now that it was selfish) to take on me the burden of a life-long silent love. For I knew that she blessed and made me better by her very presence; and some day, if there were difficulties in her life, I hoped that I might be trusted by her, and might be so happy as to clear the thorns from her path, and then to leave her, glad that she was happy, and far happier myself for having known her. But now—"

Lady Douglas could not help being touched.

"Oh!" she said; "if only we could undo your past."

He looked up at her quickly, as if about to speak, but checked himself.

"I had better go away," he said. "Until I do—"

"Douglas," called a merry impatient voice from under the window; and at the same moment Grizel knocked at the door.

" Margaret, my dear, I beg your pardon; but if you keep Ronald much longer, the General will be fairly out of patience. They trysted him at the Lady's Lodge half-an-nour ago, and the days draw in so quickly now. Nanie is just daft to be off. You have a long way to go, Ronald."

" I am coming, Grizel. Mother," he added in a lower voice, " I shall leave it all for this one day."

" Diane shall not be disappointed, one need not think," he said to himself, as he ran downstairs; " just this once more."

It was rather a rough expedition, for there was scarcely a sheep-path after they reached the head of the glen; the burns were swollen by the late rains, and little impromptu streamlets trickled down the hill-side. Everywhere was the bubbling sound of water, with an undertone of distant torrents roaring hoarsely, and of wind upon the moor. However, the couple of shaggy ponies they had with them scrambled like goats over the rocks, and every now and then a turn in the track opened to them a fresh sight of the broken mountain ridge, luridly purple, and backed by glints of pale light in a black sky.

It was later than they expected when they reached the hut, and the broken clouds were gathering again. " The fact is that we had no business to bring you two children," said General Douglas. " There is a storm coming, and I don't know how to get you home." But Marion and Diane hopped off their ponies and ran into the hut, laughing and rejoicing in its being far too late for any one to repent. If Douglas was more silent than usual, the others were too much occupied to notice it.

The old Highlander was not so ill as they expected; he was quite well enough to be ready for a " crack; " and what with the difficulty of blowing up his damp

peats into a satisfactory blaze, and his long Gaelic "confab" with the General, and the desolate grandeur of the view from his door they dawdled until a heavy storm broke and delayed them still longer.

"What a place for a man to live alone," said Diane, almost awe-struck as she stood listening to the moan of the wind, and watching it drive the rain hither and thither in gusts against the hills; a sea of rocky peaks and bare craigs rose above and beneath the hut, and far away the veritable sea stretched grey and uneasy under the storm-clouds.

"Almost like living in a lighthouse out at sea," said Ronald; "but since his wife died, this old fellow has insisted on staying here by himself. There is a herd-boy grandson comes sometimes to look him up. He doesn't mind. See, the storm is drifting away to eastward."

By-and-by the rain subsided into a drizzling mist, and the party set off homewards. But when they were nearly half way they found their path flooded by the overflow of a muddy burn, and a waterfall tumbling merrily down the hill.

There was nothing for it but to make a round of two or three miles over a morass, and across a swamp of drenched moss and blaeberry bushes. The clouded daylight had all but faded, before they struck their path again. Down came a fresh torrent of rain, bringing more self-reproaches from the General, who took refuge in scolding Douglas. "You ought not to have proposed bring Diane on a day like this," he said; "it is bad enough even for Marion who is to the manner born, but Diane will catch her death of cold, and be blown off her pony."

"We shall be all right presently. I'll take care, Uncle Norman," answered Douglas, who was splashing along by the side of Diane's small rough steed.

The little storm-beaten face into which he allowed himself an occasional glance, with its cheeks reddened by the wind and eyelashes all wet with rain-drops, gave no token of giving in.

"It's only 'a bit saft,' General Douglas," she called out in her very best Scotch.

"I wonder how Kenneth is getting on," pursued the General. "It was all very well your promising to meet him at the ford, Marion, provided he keeps his time; but I shall take you straight on home if he isn't there. I can't have you kept waiting for any one on such a night as this is going to be."

"I dare say he will be there before us," answered Marion; "he has a better road than we have."

When Kenneth that morning had started off grumbling, on a duty visit to some distant neighbours, whose son he knew in India, a meeting had been fixed with him at a certain ford he had to cross, about two miles from Dalbraith, that he might at least join in the fag end of the expedition.

At last they reached the ford. It was quite dark, and a torrent was tearing down the glen, raving over the stones, and flashing gleams of white out of the darkness from its swirls of foam.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Ronald; "Kenneth will have to look out how he crosses the ford to-night. I wonder if he is over!"

There was a rough shieling built of peat and fir-branches, close to the road-side, and two boys were standing in front of it, stopped on their way home from school, by the disappearance of the accustomed stepping-stones. Water up to their waists would not have troubled them; but this strong, tossing river was too much for them. They had waded in a little way, but wisely turned back before they quite lost their footing. Hardy and

"feckless," and without much concern how they were to get home that night, they had busied themselves in building a great bonfire of the blown down pine branches that lay about, to warm themselves, and it was blazing up brightly by this time, and casting a red glare over the water.

The road to Loch Dalbraith branched off at right angles from the ford. There was no question of crossing it for the party from the hills; but as the rain was coming down more furiously than ever, a halt was called in front of the ruddy blaze, and Marion and Diane were told to go under the shelter of the shed for a little while.

Kenneth had not passed. The boys had been here for a couple of hours, and not a soul had they seen.

"I wish we might stay till he comes," whispered Marion. "I have never seen the river so high. It really looks dangerous."

"We must and will stay," answered Diane resolutely. "Never fear, Marion, they shan't get me on my pony again, until Kenneth is across."

"He is safe enough if he takes care and keeps up stream," Ronald was saying to his uncle. "This bonfire was not a bad notion. We will keep it going to give him the right direction, and I will wait and see him over."

"We are all going to wait," said Diane, coming out of the shed into the light of the blaze, a picturesque gipsy figure, with a scarlet handkerchief bound over her roughened hair, for her hat had departed on the wings of the wind.

"Well, well, well, well," said the General, holding up his hands; "you are a set of mad people." But he did not very much object for his own part, to waiting to see Kenneth on the right side of the ford.

For half an hour they waited, drying their drenched clothes at the fire, and feeding it with fir-wood and pine-cones, and with some of the dried heather that thatched the shed.

Then they heard the distant sound of fast-trotting horse's hoofs.

"He is coming," said Ronald; and they all hurried to the edge of the stream as Kenneth rode up and halted on the other side. They could barely make out the outline of the pony and its rider in the darkness; the red glare that stretched half across the river dazzled their eyes still more.

Douglas made his hands into a trumpet and shouted directions to his cousin; but the wind fairly drowned his voice, and carried the words in another direction.

They just heard Kenneth shout back, and then he rode down into the water.

"He is all right," said Ronald to Marion. "He has only to keep up against the stream. The water is not very deep just here, even now; the pony knows well enough what he is about. He would only get the full force of the current lower down. The river deepens suddenly—Hullo!—Kenneth, keep up! keep up!"

The last words were shouted at the full pitch of his voice, but there was no knowing whether they reached Kenneth's ears or not. As the pony came wading on into the circle of light, they saw that he was going in a slanting direction, down stream instead of up. Then all at once he stumbled —staggered—seemed to lose his footing; there was a confused black mass struggling for a moment in the water, and then it was swept on out of the light.

Douglas had thrown off his coat.

"I think he must have got a blow," he said. "We can manage, Marion."

They saw him plunge into the swift torrent. At first he was hidden in a black pool close under the rock. When he emerged from that, the water seemed to catch him and whirl him round once more; then he righted himself and struck out. Just when they thought they saw him, an uprooted pine tree, its branches all nodding and tossing, came tearing down the stream, and hid him from their sight. Marion and Diane stood clasping each other.

No one uttered a sound, till suddenly there rose out of the bed of the river a strange unearthly yell —a shriek of agony. Then the two girls screamed also.

"Whist, it'll be the horse, puir beast," said one of the boys in an awe-struck under-tone; and once more the shrill weird cry rose out of the river, as it hurried the poor creature swiftly out of ken.

But Kenneth—and Douglas?

Pitch darkness where they were, and the deafening rush of water, and the wind and hissing rain. The watchers could see nothing; could hear nothing —General Douglas had disappeared. The two boys, each snatching a flaming brand out of the fire, clambered up the rocks and tried to throw a gleam of light on to the water.

"I see him; I see him," shouted one.

"Where—where?"

"See yonder! no, 'tis the tree—ah, there—the eddy has caught him."

A gust of wind and rain, and the blazing embers smouldered into smoke. Darkness again and silence. Then a faint distant shout—another!

In spite of their frantic efforts, Marion and Diane could make but little way over the slippery moss-

covered rocks that edged the stream. Several times they had fallen; the blood was trickling from a cut on Diane's forehead, but she did not know it.

Now the boys came rushing back. "The bonfire! heap her up again; they are bringing him. He's clean gane, whatever. I saw him."

"Na, na," rejoined the other, "there's the life in him yet," and they relapsed into Gaelic, and tore down the thatch and the turf walls of the shed to pile them on the fire.

The next moment two men stepped into the light of the blaze, carrying between them Kenneth's insensible figure, his head fallen back, his hair streaming with water, his face ghastly pale.

They laid him down where the red glare fell upon him, and one of them knelt down and laid his hand upon his heart.

"He's living yet," he said, looking up. "My Lord hasna a' but laid doun his life in vain."

"Is Douglas drowned?" asked Diane, staring at them in a bewildered way.

"Guid guide us; no. The Lord forbid," answered the familiar voice of Duncan the fisherman. "He's a bit exhausted, but he lies on the bank yonder, wi' the General. There's no' ane but himsel' could ha'e done it, wi' the river in spate as she is."

It was a long time before they could bring Kenneth round. His father had hurried back, and Douglas himself, still panting heavily and almost as pale as Kenneth, was kneeling by him and chafing his limbs, long before his eyes opened with a sigh and a shudder.

By this time there was a lull in the tempest, and the rays of the moon were struggling out of a rift in the clouds. A hurried consultation took place.

Duncan and two other men, waiting with the boat at the head of the loch, had fortunately become rather uneasy at the lateness of the hour, and came in search of the party. They would now land Kenneth, with Marion and the General, at the Lady's Lodge, which was the nearest point, and then take Ronald and Diane across to Dalbraith.

"My boy, I owe you more than my life," said the General, as the boat ploughed its way over the water, rocking now and then in the windy darkness. Ronald grasped his hand without answering. It was a greater pleasure than he knew how to put into words, to have rendered a service to his uncle. The good-nights were made almost in silence, and few words were spoken either, after the landing at Lady's Lodge.

Ronald leant over and "happed" Diane afresh in Duncan's great plaid, in which she was muffled from head to foot.

"You have had a hard day, child," he said; "are you very cold and very tired?"

"How can one be anything in the world to-night but very grateful?" answered Diane, almost indignantly.

"Ah,"—and presently he said—"I think you prayed to God for me."

"I don't know," she said honestly; "it was all so quick, and I was so frightened. I said 'God keep him.'"

"Thank you, Diane," he replied quietly, "I hope He will."

"He has," she added, almost in a whisper.

CHAPTER XVII

FAITHFUL FOUND

"Time and tide come round to a'
Bonnie laddie, Hieland laddie,
And upstart pride, will get a fa',
Bonnie laddie, Hieland laddie."

It appeared the next morning that Douglas had been right in thinking Kenneth had received a blow which crippled him in the water.

The pony in its struggles, had kicked him severely in the side. A few days of care and of complete rest would in all probability put him right, the doctor said; but meanwhile he ought to be kept perfectly quiet for a time, not only on account of the blow, but of the shock to his system. He had been for some time in the cold water, and it was a risk for a man who had only half-recovered from an Indian fever.

However, he was reported to be going on very well when Ronald went over to inquire after him in the early morning and later in the day General Douglas left him asleep, and went with Marion to see the scene of last night's adventure, by daylight.

The river had gone down a little, but it was still sweeping along with an impetuous rush, which gave them a clearer idea than it had been possible to gain in the darkness, both of Kenneth's danger, and of the strength and courage Ronald must have needed for the rescue.

It made Marion almost giddy to look at the swollen stream. She stood by the white ashes of their last night's fire, and shivered, while they showed her the exact place where the pony must have made his first stumble. Duncan flung in a charred branch to guide her sight; it was sucked under and whirled away almost before they could see it strike the water. Then there was the rock from which Douglas made his spring into the flood; the spot where they believed he first got hold of Kenneth; and further down—so very much further down—the turn in the stream where he had succeeded by sheer strength in stemming the force of the current, and in bringing his almost insensible prize to land.

General Douglas was overflowing with devout thanksgiving, in which Marion strove to join with her whole heart. But all the time an undefined dread was weighing on her, a kind of conviction that the consequences of the accident had not ended on the previous night. Something was coming; she could not tell what—something that kept her senses keenly alive, and prevented her from yielding to the weariness that oppressed her after yesterday's terror and fatigue. It was a strange turn in the wheel of fortune, that had made Kenneth a debtor to his cousin for his life. Every fresh tribute to Ronald's courage, and to the danger he had run, was a new burden on her. She could hardly stand by while Duncan and her uncle talked, or listen patiently to their praises of Lord Douglas, who, however, unwittingly, seemed to her to have been heaping coals of fire on Kenneth's head. She knew she was horribly ungrateful, but she could not help herself.

When they returned home, and General Douglas had gone back to his son's room, Marion went and sat by herself on a turf bench in the orchard. She

was too restless to stay with Granny—too tired to do anything rational. She was fit for nothing but to wait, gazing dreamily at the few red-cheeked apples that were still hanging on the branches before her; what she was waiting for she did not know. Before long, weariness gained the mastery over her, and with her hand leaning against the gnarled stem of a hoary old fruit-tree, she fell fast asleep. The sound of twigs snapping under an approaching step, roused her by-and-by. Looking up with a start, she saw General Douglas standing before her, and knew that her presentiment had come true.

"Marion," he began, "I want you to tell me what this means?" and he held out to her a torn envelope, on the back of which a few sentences were scrawled in pencil. She read these words:

"It must all be told now, Marion, after what R. has done. Will you tell my father for me? Say anything you please. I leave all to you—only speak soon."

"Did Kenneth send this?" she asked, turning it over and over in a confused way. "When?"

"Just now. I have been telling him how it all happened last night. He remembers very little about it; but he seemed greatly moved at hearing how nearly Ronald lost his life in saving him. I was afraid he would over-excite himself. Then he insisted on writing this for you. He is certainly in a feverish and agitated state."

"I thought he was going on so well," said Marion, but she scarcely knew what she was saying.

"I believe he is, in essentials; but now, Marion, tell me at once what all this is about? Of all things in the world I dislike a mystery."

"It is so sudden," stammered Marion. "I don't know what to say. Give me a little time."

"Nonsense, Marion; speak out, and have done

with it. Kenneth might have had confidence in me. It can be nothing very serious I should hope. He is in some scrape. What is it—money? "

"Oh, no, no; I wish it were."

"Well," he said quietly, "don't distress yourself, but speak as soon as you are able. I am waiting."

Marion did not even hear him. Was it possible, that after all that had come and gone the telling of this secret had fallen upon her? She knew there was no escape. She knew that quietly as her uncle stood there waiting, he was not to be turned now from his purpose. She knew she ought to be glad, but her heart failed her utterly.

"Marion," he said again, with an elaborate patience in his voice that betokened no relenting, "do not be so alarmed; no one will think of reproaching you in any way."

"Oh, Uncle Norman," she said, almost smiling. As if blame to herself was the thing she dreaded.

"I do not think," she added, "that you are the least prepared for the sort of thing Kenneth wants to tell you."

"I don't care for preparation," he replied. "Tell me in two words."

"That is impossible. Will you be very patient, Uncle Norman?"

Half an hour afterwards the whole was told. The General was sitting with his hands clasped over his brow, and his elbows supported by his knees. He had assumed that attitude when he saw that his broken words, his look of horror, and the lightning gleam in his eyes, so paralyzed Marion that the words died upon her lips. He did not want her to see his face; he tried even to suppress the groan that now and then broke from him; and those first epithets of contempt, almost of loathing for his son's sin were

not repeated. He would hear the whole story out, and listen to such miserable excuses as there were to be offered for him, to the very end. The bitter cup of shame must be drunk even to the dregs.

Marion in seeing his agitation had recovered her calmness. In the worst of her imaginings, she had never fancied Kenneth visited with such scorn as this. In one way a strange relief had come to her. If she had ever blamed him in her thoughts, she did so no longer. In this his dark hour, her heart undivided, undismayed, belonged to him. She stood by him, loved him, pleaded for him with her whole soul.

"I do not want to justify him," she was saying; "how could I? but only that you should see how after, in the hurry and misery of that terrible day, the wrong had been committed,—not by him, remember,—there were things which made it very hard for him (harder even than it must necessarily always have been to confess such a mistake), to put things straight, and tell how it had really been. Think, Uncle Norman, you who are ready to mete out to him such stern measure, think how he loved you."

"Loved me!" he answered with a groan. "Loved *me;* nay, do not make such a cruel excuse for him. Did he suppose I could love a coward?"

"It was just that—just that; he loved you so dearly, he could not bear to forfeit your love. He was a coward about that, if you like to call him so. Oh, have pity. Think what you are—so brave and true and stern; think of having to come to you with such a story. He thought you would cast him off."

"What if I had? It would have been better surely than to have come to this."

"Only he loved you so."

Not a shadow of relenting came over the set face that was turned on Marion.

"He loved you—not only selfishly—he thought it would break your heart."

"Men's hearts don't break like that," he interrupted somewhat contemptuously. "If they did, I think Kenneth's thought would be fulfilled now."

"His word always was, 'My father—spare my father.'"

"An easy way to silence you, Marion, and to stifle his own conscience."

"If you had seen how he suffered I don't think you would be quite so hard. When he thought of Lady Douglas—"

"Aye, when he thought of Lady Douglas; when he thought of her—what of that?"

Marion's head drooped.

"Uncle Norman," she said presently, "he could not see into the future; he could not know, poor boy, how heavily his fault would weigh on others. There was no deliberation—no looking forward; every day he intended to tell you—but—you *must* understand this, surely—every day it grew harder."

"Yes, so far I understand;" and the General started up and paced to and fro on the grass, in a storm of anger. "So far I understand, that every day sank him lower as a liar and a coward."

Marion put up her hand to brush away her tears. The harsh words hit hard.

After a few turns up and down he grew calmer, and said to her: "Go on. Finish what you wish to say."

She looked up hopelessly. "I don't think anything I can say now will move you much. It may be I have been wrong, when often and often I have urged poor Kenneth to speak; he may have been right in saying 'Let me wait—'"

"Don't stop, Marion; you may as well tell me that he was waiting for my death."

"I do not need to stop, Uncle Norman," she said proudly. "I am not ashamed to tell you that he has almost longed at times, to know that you were beyond the reach of hearing of his fall, and that he was free to speak."

"He would not have spoken—believe me. There would have been some other excuse, almost as good. There would have been Margaret's death to wait for, or Ronald's."

Marion was shrinking back with a sort of repulsion and terror from the smile upon his face. "Why do you look so horrified, Marion? Does it seem to you worse in him to think of his cousin's death, than to destroy his whole life by a cruel lie? Has he so blinded you with sophistries, poor child, that you can see no clearer than that?"

She looked up. "We were not blinded, Uncle Norman; neither Kenneth nor I. I think that our misery was our being able to see more than one side."

"Miserable clear-sightedness," he said.

He left her again, then came restlessly back. "I cannot believe it, or comprehend it. It does not seem possible—such long-sustained hypocrisy. All these years, Marion!—you are sure?"

"Think how young he was when it first happened; he was a boy."

He held up his hand. "I don't like to hear you go on in this way; it is unworthy; it does not help his cause. A boy! so was the other one a boy, younger than Kenneth. And he could stand by and see his victim suffer, year after year, and not relent! You will not tell me he is a boy now, I suppose?"

"He has spoken now," said Marion faintly.

"Or made you speak; shielding himself behind you from the discomfort of confessing. It is all

of a piece—all black. There! it does not bear speaking of. I have been harsh to you, Marion, I know, and I ask you to pardon me—but"—his voice sank—"disgrace is new to me; I find it hard to bear. Pardon me, my child. Go away now, and leave me to myself."

An hour later she saw him again, and meantime Marion, trembling, sobbing, had knelt at Granny's feet and told her all.

Her uncle's voice was very low, but perfectly calm, when he called to her at last.

"My dear," he said, "I am going home! I shall not speak to Kenneth to-night. I am going into his room only for a moment."

Kenneth lay waiting in a state of feverish impatience for the result of his missive, but his father's manner, when at last he entered the room, checked and silenced him.

General Douglas came in and stood for a moment without speaking at the foot of the bed, and Kenneth, looking up eagerly, could read nothing in his face. It seemed to him more like some exquisite old carving in ivory, than the face of a living man. There was no anger in it—no emotion—only the almost fearful calmness of rigid self-command. The proud and sensitive mouth was firmly closed, and motionless. Kenneth gazed as if he had never before noticed the deep lines drawn by time, the high, finely-cut nose, the somewhat hollow eyes, the silvery cloud of hair above the brow. But the stony stillness of the whole countenance awed him, and froze the words upon his lips.

"Marion has made me your confession," said the General, and the voice was as expressionless as his face. "I will say nothing to you now. I am not yet fit to speak, or you to listen. Good-night."

"Good-night," responded Kenneth, looking up wistfully, and mechanically holding out his hand. His father made no motion to meet it. He rather drew back; then as he was leaving the room, he turned at the door to ask, "Are you better this evening?"

"Yes, thanks, I suppose so," answered Kenneth, throwing himself back with a sigh, and when the door closed he sighed again, and lay pondering on his father's face.

As General Douglas passed through the hall, he found Lady Beatrix standing waiting for him, with her sweet, anxious face. She almost thought he was going to pass her by without speaking to her, but as she said "Norman," he stopped, and took her hand and kissed it. "God has humbled me," he said, almost inaudibly. "Pray for me, dear lady," and then he left the house.

He went home, and straight up to his own room. In that room, with its narrow camp-bed and simple furniture, a single picture—a small Spanish painting—was hung on the wall opposite to the door. It represented a Figure whose Hands were clasped, and bound. Round the Head was a crown of thorns, and drops of blood were on the Brow. It was the Face of One who had been despised—"a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

As he came into the room, General Douglas's eyes met those patient ones of the Christ.

He entered into the chamber and shut the door. No human eye looked on the strong man in his agony—the proud man in his abasement. There are some spirits of scorn, of shame, of bitter anger, that go not forth but by prayer and fasting.

Was it only the first Prince of God who wrestled with the angel until the breaking of the day?

* * * * *

It was growing late on the following day before he returned to the Lady's Lodge, and then he looked as if ten years had passed over his head. He walked feebly, and with a stoop.

"Uncle Norman, you are ill," said Marion, going to meet him. She had been watching for him for many hours.

"No." He put his hand on her shoulder, and stood for a long time looking gravely before him, in silence. "Life has been too smooth and easy," he said at last; "one must not look to float to Heaven upon golden clouds. God has laid me low. I thank Him. I am called to face a bitter shame. What is it to that which the Master bore?"

"And you can be pitiful to poor Kenneth?" asked Marion, wondering at the look of peace upon his face.

"My child," he answered, "I think I have learnt something of what temptation is," and he bent his head humbly.

"Uncle Norman, I never hoped for this."

Marion's pride of bearing was all gone, now that she no longer had to fight the battle for Kenneth.

All the afternoon they remained together; sometimes pacing up and down—oftener sitting on the turf bench in the orchard. They did not talk much. He asked a few questions, and at intervals Marion went over the story again, more in detail than had been possible yesterday.

"And you forgive him?" she asked, longing to hear the blessed assurance once more.

He did not answer directly, but seemed to be musing.

"Last night," he said after a time, "I thought that Kenneth's mother came and stood by me, and asked me to forgive her son, as freely as I had once

forgiven her. I never spoke to you of Kenneth's poor little mother, Marion."

"Never, Uncle Norman," she answered, somewhat startled by the word "forgive."

"No; I never told any living soul how it was; but it is no matter now. Poor little innocent wife! —it can hurt no one but myself now to remember it. It comes back to me so strangely to-day. I cannot help speaking about her, Marion."

"I have often wondered about her," said Marion gently, for she guessed that it was some respite from his present torture, to let his thoughts go back into the past.

"Aye," he answered; "I dare say,"—and he smiled.

"She was a child," he resumed presently, in a dreamy voice, "a child when I first remember her; a wild, shy little maiden of thirteen or fourteen, with rough, short, curly hair, and a quaint, quick manner. There was a great number of them—many sons and daughters of the house; but those two, my wife and her twin brother, kept themselves quite apart from all the rest. They were much younger, and cleverer, and more original than any of their brothers and sisters, and they only had eyes and ears for one another.

"They were a remarkable little couple, singularly, startlingly alike. They had just the same short dark hair curling over their heads, and the same broad foreheads, and rather deep-set blue eyes. They even shared the same name, for he was John and she was Joan—only at home no one ever called them anything but Jack and Gill. The names suited," said General Douglas, looking round at Marion with a smile, though he was speaking so like one in a dream, that she was not sure that he even saw her—"the

names suited, for wherever Jack was, it was pretty sure that Jill would soon come tumbling after. I never saw them apart, or thought of one without the other.

"In those days I used to be a good deal at the house, but I was a grown man, and the children never heeded me much, nor I them; only there was a special sort of interest attached to those two, and if one could get to hear their talk it was well worth listening to.

"I suppose the boy was the leading spirit. I have often wondered what he would have turned out—poor Jack!—if he had lived; nothing very remarkable, may be, for I have observed that those precocious boys seldom fulfil the great promise of their youth. His little sister was full as clever as he was, and they never agreed in their opinion of any single subject. It was their queer ways together that attracted people's notice; they were for ever disputing, arguing, wrangling over what they read, and learnt, and saw. Directly one said a thing the other contradicted it; if Jill praised anything Jack pounced down, and found fault with it with all his eloquence; but they were both so full of wit, and fun, and powers of reasoning, that one of their arguments, poor children, was as good as a play. Well, well, I can see them now, with their two curly heads bent over the same big book, and the two young voices that were like echoes catching each other up.

"I ought to tell you that, perhaps unfortunately, Jack was not sent to school. His elder brother was delicate, and had a tutor at home, so they let Jack stay. The tutor taught him, and Jill too, I believe, much more than her sister's governess. They tried to make her learn all the things a young lady ought to know; but her heart was in Jack's Greek and

mathematics, only I remember that when she began to have music lessons, Jack quietly set to work at his scales too, and always played the bass when she played the treble.

"In time I left that part of the world, and lost sight of them all for several years; and after that my regiment was ordered to the Cape. I was on the staff at that time, and only joined again later, out in Africa. I was at Dalbraith when one of my brother officers wrote to tell me that Jack Mortimer had got a commission in the regiment, and had sailed with them to the Cape. I rather wondered why they had made the boy a soldier, and I was sorry for poor little Jill. I wrote and asked my friend what kind of a fellow Jack had become. They told me he was a rough, honest lad of eighteen, very clever, for he had passed a splendid examination, but a little eccentric and argumentative.

"A month or two before I was to rejoin the regiment, I went to pay my old friends a visit. Well, there was little Jill; she came walking across the lawn to meet me—very quiet, and her hair not rough and curly any more. She was grown up, I suppose, but she did not speak much, and her eyes had become very large and wistful. She smiled when I asked her if she remembered me, and tossed back her head, just as Jack used to do. I really had not the heart to talk to her of Jack; and afterwards her mother told me the parting had half killed her. Jack had set his whole heart on going into the army, and perhaps that was the sting. They had been obliged to scold his twin sister for her grief, and lately she had grown much better; but she never mentioned Jack's name. They thought I had better not do so either, for it was better she should forget her sorrow. So I did not; but it seemed"—the

General spoke low, and a smile, half-sad, half-shy came over his face—"it seemed as if the child took kindly to me from the first. I hardly know how to tell you this part, Marion. She was very sweet and gentle. She was a great deal with me; we used to go out fishing, and she steered the boat. I was getting on towards middle age then. She used to talk to me in her soft voice—the eagerness had gone out of it now that Jack was away. I had been very sorry for her when I came, and afterwards things altered with me."

He paused for some time.

"I need only tell you that when the time came for me to go away, Joan—(they had given up calling her Jill)—Joan was sorry. Then I asked her to go with me to Africa, to be my wife. Marion, never to my dying day shall I forget the look on that child's face. There was a light on it—a joy, a love that made it, to my eyes, holy. She told me afterwards that she thought she should have died if I had left her behind. So in a short time I married little Joan."

The General was twisting a newspaper idly in his hand as he talked. Now he unfolded it, and held it for some minutes at arm's-length before his eyes, as if intently studying it. Marion did not move, and by-and-by he began again, quite unconscious seemingly, of the long pause he had made.

"Circumstances kept me in England for the better part of a year after my marriage, but at last we sailed for the Cape. She was very charming, Marion—full of life and glee, and of keen interest in everything. It was just as if she had a spring of hope and happiness in her own heart. But I used to think it an odd thing, that even to me, she never cared to speak of Jack. She used to smile when I mentioned him, and when we came in sight of land,

I told her she would soon see him. 'Yes,' she answered; 'it will be nice to see dear old Jack:' but she kept both her hands clasped over my arm while she spoke, and I thought—however I was wrong, so it does not matter what I thought.

"He was away up the country when we arrived. I think she asked to go off at once and join him, but that was out of the question. I don't recollect much about that; just at this time our boy, Kenneth, was born. I wanted to do all I could to please her, and after a few days I got leave for Jack, and sent for him. I remember how she looked up at me when she heard it, and laughed, and how she raised herself up to kiss me. Poor Jack!—they told me afterwards that he was in the highest spirits, wild to see little Jill again. A few hours before he should have reached us, he had a fall from his horse. I don't know how it happened; I never cared to hear; but he was dead when they picked him up. Yes—true—those things are very sad. Poor boy!

"Some one told his sister suddenly, before I could get home to prevent her hearing, and it killed her. Not directly—she lived for a little while; but I think—I think, she never was really herself again. When she recovered from that first long faint, she fixed her eyes on me with a look that made the blood freeze in my veins. She just said, 'Where is Jack?' and when I did not answer, she turned her face to the wall.

"One morning, soon after sunrise (I had been watching by her all night), I saw that she was conscious, and that she knew me. After a few minutes she spoke, and I will tell you what she said. 'Norman, I have never told you the truth; I only married you because I wanted to come here, and see Jack again. I never cared for you, so God has punished

me.' The words sounded so wild, that I thought, I hoped, her mind was wandering still, but she went on: 'No; it is quite true, I only cared for Jack. How could you think I should love any one else as well?'

"Then she told me, that when I went to stay with them, she tried, 'Oh so much,' she said, to make me like her. I give you her own words: 'I thought I should go mad with joy when you asked me to go with you. I have waited, patiently, all this time to come to Jack, and now he is dead.'

"Those were hard words, Marion, for me to hear.

"After that she was delirious, and then she was happy, I suppose, for she was with Jack in her fancy. Sometimes she laughed, sometimes she talked to him, and asked him questions. Once more before she died, she knew me, and asked, 'Is that you, Norman? I should like you to say you forgive me. Jack is dead, and I am dying—you can forgive me now.'"

"And you forgave?" said Marion.

He made a gesture of assent. "She was but a child, you see; she did not live to be a woman.

"But I said to her, 'My darling, won't you try to stay with me and your little child?' She only answered, 'No, I want to go to Jack.' She fell into a sleep before the end, and just as she was dropping off, she took me for her brother, and held out her arms to me. 'Come near me, Jack,' she said, 'come near me.' I did not speak, for it was too late then, and it might have disturbed her to hear my voice instead of his. She took hold of my hand. 'It is you, Jack. I could not find you. It is time for us to go home;' and she died in my arms, thinking I was her brother. It was a child's one, strong, exclusive love. But I sometimes think, Marion, that poor Kenneth never rightly had a mother."

After that they sat for a long time silent, and Marion pondered over this strange little episode in a life that had been supposed to be very smooth; no hint of it had ever before reached her, or any one else. That he should have spoken of it now proved to her how deep was the wound he had just received, so deep as to have forced from him the story of that former wrong, so long forgiven, so loyally guarded from the world.

He would not see Kenneth that evening, but next day the father and son had a long interview. All that transpired of it was that General Douglas had attached one unalterable condition to his reconciliation with Kenneth,—that the young man should himself make a full avowal to Ronald of the wrong which had been done him. No condition could have seemed harder to Kenneth. After his father had been told, he had said to himself, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." He never looked for this still more humiliating atonement.

"You must do it yourself," said the General sternly, "and in my presence;" for Kenneth muttered something about Marion. At present he was too weak to make the effort, but after a few days' waiting, Ronald was to be sent for.

Those few days were miserable and anxious ones for others besides Kenneth. At Dalbraith things were not going much more smoothly than on the other side of the loch.

Both households just then were following their own separate threads of interest, which were engrossing enough to prevent their having any thought to spare for one another.

Even Grizel did not notice that in all these days General Douglas never came near Dalbraith, nor on their side did the inmates of the Lady's Lodge

take any heed of Ronald's absent and pre-occupied manner, when he made his daily inquiries after his cousin.

Naturally, the accident had caused much less stir at Dalbraith than at the house where Kenneth had been carried in his half-drowned state. Ronald said little about it, and Diane for some reason she did not try to define, found it quite impossible to talk about that quarter of an hour of terror. Grizel, when she met them on their return, armed with hot cordials and warm greetings, ready to scold, and welcome, and overwhelm them with reproaches, and questions, and delight, could not understand why the girl clung round her neck for some minutes without speaking.

"Take her to her bed, Grizel," said Douglas; "don't you see that she is just worn out, and wet through?"

"As for that, laddie, you might look at home," retorted Grizel; "you with the water streaming from you as you stand, like a droukit hen."

But when the old cousin, having helped to take off Diane's wet clothes, wanted to see her warmly covered up at once, the child asked to be left alone for a few minutes.

"I want to say my prayers," she said, "and to try to thank God."

Half an hour after, when Grizel came back, full of the tale she had been hearing from Duncan the fisherman, in the kitchen, Diane lay with closed eyes, breathing with the even softness of youth and weariness, the rose-flush of sleep tinging her cheeks, and her hands clasped upon her breast.

Ronald for his part paced up and down his room, or stood leaning out of the open window, half the night, and before the day dawned let himself out

of the house into the wild grey morning. Not for a moment, through all the excitement of last evening, had he forgotten his talk with his mother. He did not come in to breakfast, but made his way to Lady Douglas's sitting-room as soon as he was sure of finding her there alone.

"Douglas," she began almost immediately, "I have been thinking over all this, again and again, and I believe that we were wrong yesterday. No one can call you a gambler."

"Not now. I have not touched a card for years."

"Just so. Therefore I consider that the past may be condoned. It was never a settled habit with you, and it is not a sufficient cause to stand in your light now."

"Only that her father thought it was. Mother, I should not be likely to put an imaginary barrier between myself and happiness."

"But he was speaking generally,—of people like his unhappy son; not of such as you."

"I might have thought so—indeed I should have thought-so; but M. de Beaurepaire was sufficiently explicit. There was no possibility of making a mistake."

"Are you quite sure?"

Ronald paused a moment.

"He told me in plain words that he should have wished for—an alliance between my father's family and his,—under other circumstances, but that now he considered it entirely out of the question; and then he added that he regretted having been forced to say might what annoy me. It was all plain enough."

Lady Douglas let her hands fall on to her lap, as if unwillingly convinced. "It was a harsh decision," she said.

He did not answer.

How were either of them to imagine that the words of Diane's father bore sole reference to Douglas's supposed engagement to Marian Stuart?

She could not understand his apparent calmness. She felt herself as if she could have cried out aloud under the sting of the disappointment.

"Douglas," she said, after a short pause, "I sometimes wonder if you know what love really is!"

But she was terrified at the effect her words had on him, at the flash in his eyes, at the dark red flush that crossed his forehead.

"Forgive me," she added, quickly.

"It does not matter," he answered in a low, smothered voice. "You have been passing strange judgments on me all my life. No wonder a stranger distrusted me."

"Douglas, forgive me. I only felt that I could not have borne this as you do—that—"

"No more," he repeated, holding up his hand. "Tell me only what I can do for Diane."

"As this is the case," she resumed in a minute or two, quite subdued by his manner. "As this is the case—"

"I ought to go away. Do not distress yourself, mother. I know it."

"This is your own house, Douglas." It was one of the sentences which used to gall him, but he took no notice now.

"I only ask what I ought to do for her?"

"You are right, then. Either you or Diane must leave Dalbraith."

"Not she," he said quickly—"not she."

After that he prepared to leave the room, but his mother called him back. "Douglas," she said with a slight hesitation in her voice, "one thing more. Until you go, you must try to change your

manner. Diane is very young; she may not have understood. It may be that Grizel and I were mistaken. Try and hide from her—what we could not help seeing."

Ronald bit his lip and turned away. "Very well," he said in a constrained voice. Perhaps the last injunction was the hardest of all.

No wonder those days were bitter ones to all concerned. Diane could not understand it at all at first; she thought it was by accident that he was away from her all day, and she went about singing as usual; then she began to be puzzled.

Grizel was puzzled to. She tried in all sorts of blundering ways to bring the two together again. She could not bear to see the flickering colour come and go in Diane's little face, nor could she make out Ronald's distant courtesy, or the roughness that something made more tender than the gentlest words would have been. Her anxiety kept poor Grizzy on the trot all day long.

"Nanie," she said, coming into the little dark room that Diane had been allowed to make into a work-shop, and where she kept her wood-carving and her easel, "I wonder what you will do when the dark winter days come on."

"I shall carve, and work, and read hard, and learn to skate upon the loch," answered Diane, looking up from the wreath of water-lilies she was modelling. "I shall like it. I am not a bit afraid."

"But you will be so lonely, with only two old women."

She looked up quickly. "When Ronald is gone, you know!" added Grizel, ruthlessly.

The chisel made a great slip in the girl's hands. She laid it down, and turned round with a pale

face. "I have spoilt my work. What were you saying?"

"I asked you if you would miss Douglas."

"Is he going?"

"That he is, and directly. Won't you tell him you will miss him, Nanie? Perhaps he would stay."

She shook her head.

After that she seemed to understand that something was wrong. She was very brave, but she trembled, steadied herself, was indignant, wistful, gentle, angry, all by turns,

In the evening, as Douglas stood in the window looking out mechanically at the moon half draped with clouds, she went quietly to the piano, and began to sing. At first her voice quivered a little, but she overcame that, and went on, only looking round between each song with one short, eager glance.

They were all the gayest songs she knew. Not a farewell or a lament among them. But as they followed each other, and he did not move or notice them, a strained jarring tone came into her voice that robbed the music of all gaiety, and made strange discords between the singer and her songs. At last she stopped, waited a moment or two, then closed the piano very gently, and stood up.

If she could have known how hard she had made that last half-hour to Ronald, she might have spared herself and him. He had tried all the time to tear himself away, but his courage failed him.

And thus the week passed on. Ronald had lost his presence of mind, and in some degree his self-control. He was so wrapped up in his own struggle, that he scarcely knew how he appeared to others. He hardly even spoke to Diane now, hardly noticed her. When they met in the passages or on the stairs he stood back and let her pass in silence.

Once they met thus in the hall. He was going out, as she and Grizel came up the steps.

Diane did not look up this time. She tried to hurry past him, but Grizel seized her hand and stopped her.

"Ronald," she said, suddenly turning round to him, "if you and Nanie love each other, what for do ye not say so?"

Douglas stood still, spell-bound by the words. "Hush!" he began indistinctly; "you don't know what you are saying;" but Grizel laid her hand upon his arm. "Look," she said, pointing to Diane. The girl had stopped short with parted lips, clasping her hands quickly together, but the next minute Ronald saw the great, sad, wondering eyes lifted frankly up to his.

Whatever he read in them—was it the question or the trust? both were there—made a sudden sob rise in his throat. He held out his arms, but more to push her away than to gather her to his heart, and he called out, "You must not love me, Diane; you must not."

"But she does," said Grizel softly.

And then there was a pause, while the big tears brimmed over Diane's eyes and fell. In another second he was holding her in his arms, and crying, "Forgive me, Diane. Little love, forgive me."

Grizel slipped away choking with mingled joy and pride. She had done it now. It was all over and the clouds were gone.

Alas! if she could have looked back, her innocent exultation would have been rudely dashed to the ground.

Ronald had put Diane into one of the deep window-seats, and he was standing himself at the foot of the two steps that led up to the recess, or rather kneeling

with one knee on the step, his arms folded, and his eyes bent on the ground, as if he would not allow himself to look at her. He was speaking in a low voice; she listening with her face hidden in her hands.

His short, curt sentences, unfinished sometimes or only ended by sheer force of will, and her quick-drawn sighs, told that he could not bring himself to speak, or she to listen, calmly. "My darling," he began; "you who know so much against me must hear yet more. I must tell you why you must not love me. Diane, the faults of my past life have risen up against me, and it is you who have to suffer."

And it was all told. Nothing was softened. The scene by her father's death-bed; his last charge; the solemn oath required and given; of all that he could speak quietly. It was when he spoke of her coming to Dalbraith, and asked if she could forgive him for the sorrow he had caused her, that his voice changed, broke, once or twice gave way entirely.

"I knew myself to be a sin-stained and grief-stricken man, and you are a child. I thought such as you must dislike and dread me because of the great misfortune of my life. My poor mother never forgot it. Marion drew back from me when I was a boy—and then to find that you—oh, my white daisy, my little pure-hearted violet!—you—"

Diane jumped up and bent over him. She put her hand on his shoulder, and her kiss and her tears too, fell upon his forehead. "God bless you, Diane. God bless you for ever. I can believe in Him and thank Him now—even though this is good-bye."

Poor Grizel! "The best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley."

The morning ended with an urgent summons to Douglas, to go and see his uncle without delay at the Lady's Lodge.

CHAPTER XVIII

TENDER AND TRUE

"I've rocket your cradle, Lord Ronald, my son,
I've rocket your cradle, my handsome young man,
My heart it was light, and the tears they ran down,
But oh! they were sweet, and they dried again soon."

In the afternoon of that day, three people were gathered in the book-room of the Lady's Lodge.

Kenneth lay on a coach between the window and the fire-place. His father was standing behind him, somewhat withdrawn into the shadow, and Lord Douglas leant over the back of a chair, looking down upon his cousin.

He had come in obedience to his uncle's summons, but he was evidently restless and impatient to escape, for he had risen from his chair as soon as a few constrained sentences had been exchanged. Kenneth was equally ill at ease.

"I sent for you, Douglas," he said when Ronald moved.

"Yes,"—and he paused, leaning over the chair.

"I owe you my life," Kenneth resumed abruptly, "and I have something to give you in exchange."

"Surely, Kenneth, that is quite unnecessary."

"I tell you fairly that I had far rather you had left me to drown, than have been saved by you, and forced out of common gratitude to say what I have to tell you now."

"Then don't say it," answered Ronald, puzzled by this strange way of speaking, and by the General's rigid stillness as he stood at the head of the couch, silent and watchful like a sentinel.

Kenneth glanced back at his father with the same look of desperate vexation and impatience. "I have no choice," he said. "You saved my life and you have a right to your reward;" and again he paused.

"I have not a notion what you are driving at," said Ronald; "and surely it is unnecessary to talk about rewards."

"But that is just it. I must. You have left me no loop-hole. Bad as some folks think me, I have not sunk quite so low as to go on injuring the man who risked his life for mine. I only wish he had left it alone," he added more bitterly, less in the light tone which he had hitherto assumed.

"Pray do not let us have any confessions," said Ronald quietly. "If you think you have ever done me any harm—which I don't believe—I bear you no grudge whatever."

He was thinking about Marion.

"It's on the cards," rejoined Kenneth, "that you will change your tone."

"Kenneth, you are trifling," interposed his father.

"Uncle Norman," said Ronald, "if Kenneth really has anything he wants to say to me, don't you think it might be easier for us both if you left us to ourselves?"

General Douglas shook his head. "I can't trust him," he said, without looking up.

Ronald looked from one to the other, startled and perplexed, and for the first time roused to the perception that something of real importance was on hand.

"Of course *I* do not mind your being here," he said, "for I have not the smallest clue to all this mystery."

"There is no mystery," began Kenneth in a low, quick, husky voice. "This is the whole of it. Years ago, when I was a boy, I let you be deceived, and deceived you myself. Now the time has come to undeceive you. The mystery, as you call it, dates back from the day of your father's death."

Kenneth paused to breathe. He heard his father draw a quick breath too. Both knew that he was committed now beyond recall.

"Go on," said Ronald.

"It is not so easy to go on. You remember that day—in the wood—I came to tell you of the accident."

"I remember."

"Well, can't you guess? You were told you had done it. Don't you understand now?"

"I understand nothing," replied Ronald briefly.

"God knows I thought you had done it when I came to tell you. I was mistaken."

"How were you mistaken?"

"Good heavens, Ronald! will you never understand? I tell you I was deceived myself. It has been harder on me than on you."

"Forgive me," said Ronald, turning to his uncle. "I suppose I ought to know what it all means, but I don't. The thought of that day always confuses me. Tell me in plain words, Uncle Norman."

General Douglas referred him by a gesture back to Kenneth.

"In plain words then, Adam Haldane told me you had shot your father. It was a lie. I shot him."

"Merciful God!" exclaimed Ronald, falling back a step or two.

He did not realize at all in that first moment the burden that had been lifted from himself. He only understood that a weight such as that which had crushed his own life for years, had fallen on his cousin. "Kenneth! and you never knew."

Kenneth looked up again at his father. The torture of having the story dragged from him piecemeal by Ronald's slowness of apprehension, was almost more than he could support. He had cleared his cousin now. What was the good of saying any more? Why not, at least for the moment, leave Douglas to believe that he too had only just learnt the truth?—but he read no sign of relenting on his father's face.

What those moments were to General Douglas, who can tell? He saw, without returning it, the glance of unworthy entreaty in Kenneth's eyes; he saw Ronald's face, full of pity and wonder. He prepared himself to speak, giving Kenneth, with a breaking heart, just one more chance. He heard a half-laugh, that most assuredly carried with it no suggestion of mirth, and Kenneth's voice said, "That is why I tell you that you have something to forgive. I did know it!" and then he saw the flash of utter incredulity pass over Ronald's face.

"You knew it, and you told no one? I don't believe it."

"I told Marion," said Kenneth, "and she begged me to tell you. I bound her by an oath to keep my secret. It was no fault of Marion's."

"Marion!" exclaimed Ronald; and then suddenly he seemed to believe what he had heard, and a flame of passionate horror and anger blazed up and took entire possession of him.

"You knew it!" he repeated hoarsely, taking a step forward.

"Adam Haldane told me."

"You knew it, and you stood by, and saw it all, and never told?"

"You must consider, Ronald,—"

"Answer me: you knew it all these years?"

"I knew it, but—"

He stopped with an involuntary backward movement, and General Douglas with one quick stride came forward and caught the arm that Ronald in his fury was raising on his cousin.

"He is helpless," the General said in a low voice.

Their eyes met—Ronald's and his uncle's—a deep flush mounted to the young man's forehead, and he fell down on his knees at the foot of the coach, his head bent forward on his folded arms.

His was a nature strong to trust, strong to suffer, strong therefore to resent. He knelt on with his face hidden, motionless, unconscious of the presence of any one else. He did not know with what startled, eager eyes, Kenneth was watching him; he did not see the gathering misery in his face, as he began to realize that pardon was not the easy, matter-of-course thing he had expected to win so lightly. Ronald did not feel Norman's hand laid for an instant on his bowed head, nor had he any power to think of the crushing blow that had fallen upon the father,—that mirror and soul of knightly honour.

But Norman Douglas had put away and renounced all personal share in this sorrow. His self-consciousness was merged in the realization of what his two boys were going through. He felt that to both had come the darkest hour of their lives; to Kenneth as well as to Ronald—the darkest hour of temptation. For the first time Kenneth was seeing his sin, even as it was, unmasked and stripped of the

sophistries with which he had always contrived to cover up its ugliness. For the first time the terror of the unforgiven was upon him. For the first time there dawned upon him the meaning of the word Despair. For if his cousin, if Ronald could not forgive him,—Ronald, who himself needed pardon for many things in his life—if to Ronald the injury looked so black, how could God, the All-just, the All-holy, forgive his sin? His father, knowing well how the full meaning and scope of God's forgiveness had never touched his son's heart, feared for him as he saw him, surprised and shivering, shrink back from the grasp of that shadow, who has been truly called the Giant Despair.

And then Ronald—poor, true, strong-hearted Ronald, who had yet wasted so much of his life and of his strength, that to struggle up to that serene height of virtue which would enable him to forgive, seemed an unattainable achievement—Ronald, too, had met the tempter in a new form to-day, and rage and hate pinioned his soul closely, and forbade him to think of pardon.

For him, too, his uncle felt that a turning-point had come. The choice between good and evil was given him in this hour. If the lower nature was suffered now to prevail, that bright spark that had ever shone in his soul, and told of a Divine essence burning there yet, would most surely be dimmed or quenched.

Norman Douglas stood there silent, but not helpless, to watch the fight. Like Moses on Mount Horeb, his arms were lifted up, and his whole soul rose to God, in one mighty agony of prayer for victory. Kenneth, turning on his father his startled anxious eyes, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel in its strength of pity and of pleading.

Still silence!—still it seemed as if Ronald never even breathed. Still the ticking of the clock, beating out second after second, until half an hour had passed. There are times when thirty minutes seem like eternity—unending.

Once Kenneth, unable longer to bear the suspense, raised himself suddenly, and stretched out his hand to rouse his cousin, but an imperative sign from his father stopped him. For neither of them would Norman Douglas shorten that hour, bitter though it was.

Afterwards, Ronald, in speaking of it as he did once or twice to one person, very briefly, called it his "agony." But he did not tell—probably he could not call back—the storm of thoughts that swept over him, after that first impulse of blind violence, and the shame that followed it. When Kenneth once described in his hearing his experience when he was drowning, and how, after the waters closed on him, there rushed over him, as in a dream, each scene of his past life, Ronald said quickly, "Yes, I know how," and turned away. It may be, that as he went down, and was overwhelmed by the dark waters of hatred and horror, some such vision passed before him of his life, wasted and distorted by a lie.

It was his dog, Bounce, who roused him at last.

The whole time, like a touch of homely humour in a tragic picture, Bounce stood, head on one side and tail half-mast high, watching his master acutely, with a world of meaning in his face.

With that odd second thread of thought, that all are familiar with in the most critical moments of their life, General Douglas had seen the dog's perplexity, and had sympathized with him. He saw his sense of injury, his wish to understand, his doubt

whether it would be excusable in him to interfere. Once, without moving his head, Bounce glanced reproachfully out of the corners of his eyes at the General; then he softly advanced one paw, and whined. At last, almost to General Douglas's relief, for the tension was rapidly becoming unbearable for Kenneth's sake, Bounce's sense of discipline gave way to loving impatience, and he launched himself with a bark on to his kneeling master.

Ronald rose to his feet instantly, glanced from his uncle to Kenneth, and stood with his head bent down beside the couch.

"Ronald, for mercy's sake say something." Kenneth's voice broke the long stillness with an odd mixture of entreaty and vexation.

"Say," repeated Ronald; "say what?"

Kenneth sighed. "Can't you say that you forgive?"

"Have you ever thought of my mother?" asked Ronald, in a low, deep voice.

"God knows I have," said Kenneth, after an interval of startled thought. "God knows I have, often,—often."

Ronald looked at him.

"And yet you did not speak?" he said, and then seemed to ponder again.

Once more Kenneth tried to wring from him some word of relenting, but Ronald stopped him fiercely, bidding him be silent, and let him think. Alas, for those thoughts which had not turned to prayers! —that silent, savage brooding over his own wrongs. His face hardened and darkened more and more.

General Douglas crossed the floor, and opened the door quietly into the adjoining room, and the sound roused Ronald. He turned himself towards Kenneth as if to speak, his eyes fastened on his

cousin's face, and on the strained ears fell—slowly, clearly, resolutely uttered,—the deliberate words of a curse.

"Coward!" he called his cousin. "Liar, traitor!" and for the destruction of his mother's love, for the evil he had wrought between them, for the utter ruin of his own life, he cursed him.

Just then the door, opened by General Douglas, was pushed farther back. Marion, pale as death, stood on the threshold, and behind her was Lady Douglas.

Ronald's mother stood still. Marion rushed forward with a cry, and caught his hand. "Ronald, Ronald, have mercy."

He had not even heard her enter, but at her voice he stopped speaking instantly, pausing abruptly with an unfinished sentence on his lips. "Ronald, unsay your words. Call them back," she prayed him wildly. "You don't know what you were saying."

He raised the hand she had put upon his arm gently, and kissed it. He looked at her with a sort of smile.

"Marion," he said, "*you* are as true as steel."

Turning, he met his mother. Marion was silent then—all were silent. They knew what that meeting must be to him. Even Kenneth, with the new curse upon his head; Marion in her despair; General Douglas in this supreme moment of his wrestling in prayer with a God who did not seem to hear—alike forgot everything, to watch how these two would bear themselves.

How strange it was! How unlike what might have been foretold, of the moment when mother and son would stand face to face, the cloud between them gone!

She was holding out her arms towards him. She would have put them round his neck, but he raised

his hands quickly and took hers in them, holding her away from him, while he looked into her face.

It was white, set, scared. The horror of that long-past day of horror had been brought surging round her again. And in her eyes he read—or thought he read—the old, never-forgotten struggle between pity and repulsion.

Still holding her away, he said slowly, "You know now that I did not kill your husband!"

"My poor son!" whispered Margaret; "my poor son!"

Douglas laughed, a sudden jarring laugh. "I don't wonder you can't believe it. I can't believe it myself." And then he dropped her hands, and without looking at any of them again he left the room.

Marion had fallen back against the wall. Lady Douglas stood still just where he had left her, and Kenneth lifted up his bloodless face towards his father, with a smile that looked to Marion as if the withering effects of the curse were already working on him. "The help you counted on and prayed for, has forsaken us, it seems," he said.

Norman Douglas raised his head. His nostrils were quivering, his hand shook, his breath came short and hard; but at his son's sneer, a gleam of triumphant faith and love streamed across his face.

"The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth," he said solemnly, lifting up his hand, "and He hath not forsaken us."

* * * * *

Late that night a messenger came to Dalbraith from the hills, with a few lines from Ronald, bidding Grizel tell his mother that he had gone to the north shooting-lodge.

The events of the day had fairly overwhelmed poor Grizel. She had begun it with such bright hopes, and such a sense of successful management. But her pride had soon been taken down. She spent most of the morning rocking Diane in her arms, fondling and comforting her like a little child, for the girl in her first grief came straight to the kind old woman, and with her arms round Grizel's neck and her eyes hidden on her shoulder, whispered in broken words the sad little story of her love and its hopelessness. People might laugh at Grizzy, but she knew at least one art of healing; she could weep with those who weep.

"My lamb, my Nanie! Whist, my bonnie bairn." Somehow the childish words comforted Diane better than wiser ones would have done.

But what was the great rush of feeling that came later, when Kenneth's avowal reached Dalbraith? Was it joy, or was it pain, or was it both together? Pure pity in Grizel's heart for the laddie who had gone so far astray, and must have suffered so much; pride and gladness for Ronald; and oh! such an aching sense that the wrong which had been done him could never be put right.

Diane, wearied out with tears and sorrow, had fallen asleep. She awoke to find the evening shadows gathering in her turret-room, and Grizel standing by her bed, with a face full of awe and wonder.

"My Diane," she said, "I have tidings for you. God has sent a word of comfort to our Ronald;" and she told what she had just heard.

"Oh," cried Diane, springing up, and clasping her hands in ecstasy, "thank God. Thank God. Oh, my Ronald! my Ronald!"

Grizel stroked her hair tenderly. "My bonnie

dear, I'm fearing that it makes but little difference between you and him."

"I know that." Diane looked at her with a smile that was almost unearthly in its intensity of pure unselfish joy. "I know that. What does that matter? Oh Douglas, my hero!—free, free at last."

"And little good will it do him to be free, poor fellow, if he can't have you," sighed Grizel.

"Cousin Grizel," said the girl, "you don't know; you can't know; no one knows what this has been to him. And this day the load is lifted off his heart, and the weight that spoils his life is taken away. God is good; God is just; and Douglas can hold up his head, his noble head, among his fellows. Oh, he will not miss me now; he will not need me half so much. Don't tell me not to be glad, Cousin Grizzy."

"My dear," said Grizel, "you are very generous. I love you for it. But,—"

Diane kissed her and softly stroked her face. "No, Gousin Grizel, we must not grieve to-day. We are too happy. We can only think of Douglas—in his joy and gratitude."

"But he went away angry. He is not glad or grateful. How can he forgive a wrong like that? He has gone away with bitter anger in his heart."

"Dear Cousin Grizel," said Diane with a soft proud smile, "don't you know him better than to be afraid? Our Douglas, 'tender and true.' Can't you trust him?"

Downstairs Ronald's mother was sitting by herself staring at the fire, like a person in a trance. On no one had the revelation made to-day, broken with a more startling shock. The moment when her son turned from her outstretched arms, was an era in her life. It was as if a flash of lightning had darted out, and showed her for a moment all her past; all her

weak self-pity; her narrow grief; all the harm which she had done. She looked round with a vacant gaze at General Douglas, at Marion still leaning breathlessly against the wall, at Granny who had stolen softly in and was bending over Kenneth's couch.

Margaret was the first to leave the room, and by-and-by Marion came to her and knelt down before her, and took her hands, looking up with an agony of dumb entreaty into her face.

Lady Douglas looked at her with a strange sudden stirring of pity. "Do you love—this young man, Marion?" she asked in a low voice.

"With my whole—whole heart," answered Marion steadily, though two red spots of colour rose on her white cheeks.

The girl's loyalty and unswerving love threw a halo over her unworthy lover. Surely there must be some redeeming quality in Kenneth to have won such love as this. Henceforth those who spoke of him in her presence, nay, even in her absence, were forced to do so with a certain unwilling respect. At all events they refrained from one contemptuous epithet. To love, and not to be able to respect! It was a hard fate for one like Marion.

But once again she stood by him as the good angel of his life. He was lying an hour later, with his hands clasped over his eyes, thoughts of rebellion and despair chasing one another across his mind; dreary doubts and stinging shame crushing him to the ground; when a slow step roused him.

The room was getting dusk; he could just distinguish a tall figure in black standing by his couch. It was the last person in the world he should have dreamt of seeing there. "Lady Douglas!" he said in a whisper, trying mechanically to stand up.

She gently pushed him back, and bending over him, she kissed his forehead.

"Cousin, Margaret!"—the words were hurried and smothered. "*You!*—can *you* forgive? Do you not hate me?"

"No, no; never that again;" and after a pause she added: "I know what it must have cost you, poor Kenneth."

She glided away; but that which neither his bitter shame, his father's compassion, Granny's tenderness, had been able to wring from him, Marion had won for him now. Those words, that kiss from the widow and the mother of the Douglas's, broke down his pride and his despair.

"Marion," he called; and as she hurried to his side he said breathlessly, "Call my father." General Douglas came. "Marion," repeated Kenneth, holding her hand tightly, "tell me what to say."

She fell on her knees by him, whispering the words: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee"—

"And I am no more worthy," added Kenneth with one deep sob, "to be called thy son."

It was late on the evening of the next day, that General Douglas dismounted from his pony at the door of the lonely shooting-lodge up on Ben na Gruach. He found his nephew in the house, brooding sullenly over a smouldering fire. The room was low, and roughly-furnished, with small windows that let in little of the scanty daylight, so that at first the newcomer could hardly make out the outline of the figure in the chimney-corner, especially through a dense cloud of tobacco-smoke.

Ronald looked up rather impatiently; evidently he had not expected his solitude to be invaded,

and half-resented it, though he said nothing, only moved forward without alacrity, pitching his cigar upon the hearth as he did so.

"I have not come to disturb you on my own account, Ronald; I come from your mother."

"Sit down, Uncle Norman," was the only answer.

Douglas went across the room, flung open one of the small windows, and threw himself down heavily again in his own chair.

"I can understand your not caring to be intruded on. I am sorry, Douglas."

There was a gentle courtesy and dignity in his manner that it was difficult to resent or resist.

"I only wish I could give you a better welcome," returned Ronald, with an attempt at greater cordiality. "I am quite alone up here."

"Your mother is very anxious you should come back. She is uneasy lest you should leave the country without seeing her again. There is much she wants to say to you since my unhappy son's confession."

"There is no good in my going back," said Ronald gloomily.

"Only that it is your mother's wish. She sent or me this morning. It is difficult for me to speak to you on this subject; but if you could hear from herself, that which she said to me, it would be well. 'Tell him for one thing,' she said, 'that I have wasted my life and his, and that I know it.' Forgive me, Ronald—I have no right, I feel, to intrude advice upon you—but a son can hardly allow his mother so to humble herself before him, and make her no return."

Douglas glanced at the worn face opposite him. "All this is very hard on you, Uncle Norman," he said abruptly.

"Let us leave that aside."

Douglas pushed the dying embers roughly together with his foot. "Look here, Uncle Norman," he began quickly by-and-by, "you should not have come here. I cannot sit here and talk to you, and yet feel as I do to Kenneth—and that I cannot alter. You had better let me go my own way."

"Come back with me to Dalbraith, Ronald," said the General, passing over the last part of this speech with a sigh.

"No; I won't do that;" but in spite of his rough tone he was touched by the sad patience of his uncle's manner. For the first time he felt a wish to be able to forgive. Hitherto, he had brooded without ceasing over that unpardonable chain of injuries, the first link of which was his mother's coldness and estrangement, the last and heaviest, the loss of Diane. For it all came from that one dastardly act—the misery that had driven him to gambling that he might forget—the recklessness that had been his ruin. It would be almost faithless to Diane to forget the cause of their separation.

"You don't know half that this has brought on me," he said after another long interval of silent pondering.

The General made no answer. He only slightly shook his head.

"I should have come to grief anyhow, as likely as not," proceeded Douglas. "There's nothing particularly to be gained by putting the blame on other people—and yet—" He took up the old game-book that lay on the table near him, turned over its pages rapidly, and flung it down again. "Things must remain as they are, Uncle Norman."

His hearer looked at him compassionately.

Ronald moved restlessly, shaded his face with his hand, and beat his foot upon the floor. It seemed to his uncle as if it was a restraint on him

to feel that he was being watched. He got up presently. "I will come back to you, Ronald, before I go away."

Douglas raised his head. "There is no use in *saying* I forgive if it means nothing."

Again the General made no reply, but he turned slowly to leave the room.

"It is hard work, Uncle Norman."

Norman Douglas put his hand for a second on the young man's head, as he had done yesterday. "God be with you in that work, my son," he said, "and give you grace that you may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon you the armour of light."

"Don't go, please," said Ronald; "we need not talk."

The General sat down again quietly. Ronald felt the help of the man's mere presence. He too had met temptation, and had overcome.

Now and then Ronald raised his eyes. The other did not stir, but sat leaning back with his head a little raised, gazing abstractedly at a rough sketch of Ronald's father, that hung high up on the wall. He remembered well its being done by an artist friend, during one of the merry shooting parties of long past days. He remembered Tam Glen, the old white pony, across whose back, in the drawing, a dead stag was slung. Lord Douglas's figure, with his rifle over his shoulder, was full of spirit, though it had been thrown aside and left unfinished, when artist and sitter started off for the forest. The old forester found it some days afterwards, and got it framed at Inverness.

General Douglas well remembered his pride when he had hung it just under the ceiling of the sitting-room at the Lodge. But now he scarcely saw the

picture on which his eyes were resting. His thoughts were more with the living than the dead.

Noble as his face had always been, Ronald felt that there was something higher in it to-day than there had ever been before—something that appealed to him with greater force than words. Here was one who had indeed suffered and conquered suffering; who was wounded and forgave; a haughty man to whom the shadow of disgrace was worse than death; but who yet had met it meekly, humbling himself under the mighty hand of God. The mist came across Ronald's sight, as he watched the keen proud face, now so gentle and resigned.

And when with a rush, the recollection swept across him of all he owed his uncle, the question came with it also—Who was he that he should refuse forgiveness? Was it thus he should repay the strong, forbearing, patient care that had never failed his boyhood? Whatever the provocation—and even now he could not under-value it—was it for him to call down a curse on the head of his uncle's son? There was horror in the thought.

"Uncle Norman," he exclaimed suddenly, "what have I been about? My dear old Uncle, are you asking me to forgive a son of yours? I wonder how often you have forgiven me—who am unworthy to forgive?"

He started up and crossed the hearth impulsively. His uncle stood up too. "Can you do this thing," he asked gravely, holding out his hand, "with your whole heart, Ronald? Remember this must be once and for ever."

"Amen," said Ronald, wringing the offered hand; "so be it then,—once and for ever."

Meanwhile the night had closed in, but the moon would rise by-and-by, and by her light General Douglas purposed returning to Dalbraith.

"You will give me something to eat," he said, "and afterwards you will come back with me, Ronald."

Douglas hesitated and sighed. How could he go back so soon, and see Diane again? Between every one else there might be forgiveness and peace, but none the less were he and Diane parted.

His uncle marked his hesitation. "I will go and see after my own pony at least, and you can think about it. Meanwhile there is a letter that I want you to look at while I am gone. Do me the favour, Ronald, to read it carefully."

He took a paper out of his pocket-book, and laid it on the table beside Ronald. Then he lighted a candle, blowing together the dying embers that he might do so. The young man looked on with listless eyes. It was an old faded letter that was placed beneath his hand, crushed, and in part torn away. "I shall be glad to discuss it with you, when I come in again, Ronald," said the General, turning at the door, as he saw that his nephew made no motion to take it up. Ronald unfolded it wearily, when he was left alone. It was written in French, in an unfamiliar hand, in small pointed characters that were difficult to decipher, and it called Norman Douglas, "Mon cousin."

Reading hurriedly, and at first carelessly, as the long-winded descriptive sentences seemed to point at nothing especially interesting, Douglas found himself presently involved in an enthusiastic, detailed, passionately admiring description of an ideal woman. (Very French, he muttered to himself.) She was noble, this woman of when the letter dealt, pure-hearted, pious, forgiving injuries, rewarding good for evil, gracious, and in every way distinguished. "*Telle a été notre parente, Lady Beatrix.*" Those were the first words that

fixed Douglas's attention. He glanced hurriedly at the signature, and saw as he had expected, "Marquis de Beaurepaire." Reading on he came upon this passage—"And so, as they tell me, the little Marion, grandchild of that so-admirable woman, marries the young Lord Douglas, son to the chosen friend of my youth. '*J'y consens volontiers*,' glad that a gleam of sunshine so bright should gild the evening of my respectable cousin's life, the touching story of whose youth still makes the heart to beat. We owe her something of reparation—we Beaurepaires, through whom, alas! the morning of her days was so heavily shadowed by clouds. I rejoice in her joy. For she may leave her child tranquilly, *chér* Norman, in such hands. I know the young man—the young Douglas—well. I have studied him much. I know all his history since the sad mischance of his boyhood. I watched him when my poor son Gaston, for a brief space, threw over him an evil but unavailing spell; and I can tell you this—that if, instead of to my dear friend's grandchild, the prospect of a husband so noble, a fate so secure and serene, had fallen to the lot of my little Diane, I who speak to you would say my *Nunc Dimittis* gaily to-morrow itself, and shut my eyes in peace upon this weary world."

Ronald read no more. It was as though a voice from the other world had spoken—a dead father had granted him his child. His head sank forward on to the table, resting on the hands that still grasped the open letter.

"Well, Ronald," said his uncle's voice beside him after a long time had passed.

He jumped up.

"Uncle Norman, how soon can we get back to Dalbraith? Do you mind rather a dark ride? I

must get home as quick as I can. You haven't the least notion what this letter has done for me. There is not a moment to explain now. By the way though, why did you show it to me? You don't mean to say you guessed? Was it for that? My dear Uncle Norman!" as he saw his uncle smile.

"How on earth did you find out?" he added.

"I cannot say I found it particularly hard," replied the General dryly; "but in point of fact your mother gave me a hint how the land lay."

Ronald seemed hardly able to wait for an explanation, or to attend to it when given. He crossed the room, and throwing open the door shouted some impatient orders to an unseen individual, who responded in guttural tones from the back of the Lodge. His uncle stood watching him; he moved, spoke, looked like a man from whom a crushing load had been suddenly lifted off. There was a freedom, a lightness, in his every step and gesture; a curious sense of suppressed rapture, in the long breath he drew when he came back to the fireside and the General. But there was a trial of patience in store for him. A blinding mist had gathered over the hills with the twilight, and the fog was so dense that even the most ardent lover would fail to keep the track, or to miss the craigs and chasms that would beset his path. By-and-by the rain came pelting down, and gusts of wind shook the Lodge to its foundations, rattling the windows, and roaring like great guns in the chimney.

There was nothing for it but to wait with as much equanimity as he could muster, for the daylight.

"Now, Uncle Norman, can you explain things a little?" asked Ronald, as they sat on opposite sides of the fire—"that letter?"

"I have had it by me for two years. By some

queer chance—or providence—I did not burn it, as I do most of my letters."

"And you never showed it me."

"Why should I? I had resolved never again to interfere as I once did, most unwisely, between you and poor Marion. I looked on, and I hoped, but I would do nothing. Indeed, until your mother spoke to me yesterday I did not know the rights of it all."

"But now, this evening—all this time, you had this letter in your pocket."

Unconsciously the General drew himself up. "This evening I would not appear to offer you a price for your pardon to my son. It would have been time enough to give you the letter when you had finally refused it to him. Besides," and his voice softened, "I wanted you to have the blessing of granting full forgiveness, while the cloud was still over you."

"I understand that," said Ronald, "and I thank you. But, Uncle Norman, you can't tell what this is."

"I know Diane, my boy; I do not much wonder at you."

Ronald turned away quickly to the window, striving to keep his command over himself.

"You are sure this is sanction enough," he said, coming back with the letter still in his hand, and speaking in an anxious voice. "I have to think for her."

"Entirely so," answered the General emphatically. "Let yourself be happy, Ronald. God wills it."

It seemed as if Ronald hardly knew how to manage the great flood of happiness that had come upon him in the last half hour. It almost puzzled him, it was so new a sensation; and in truth, he wanted to get

away by himself, that he might look this dazzling joy in the face.

For the last four and twenty hours he had been brooding unceasingly over a dark wrong, and bitterly regretting a lost past. It was not until, with a mighty effort, he had cast resentment and hatred behind him, that he at all began to realize from what he had been delivered by Kenneth's confession. Looking up, his eyes caught the dusky outline of his father's picture. It was a fact that the sight of this rough, happy-looking sketch had always given him a sharper pang than any of the other things that recalled his father. Now with the swift stab of accustomed pain, came also a wild rush of relief and exultation. For the first time it burst upon him that the sting of his grief was gone.

He forgot even Diane for a moment, and stood gazing upwards like one entranced. "O Father!" he said half aloud, "I had no hand in your death."

A short sigh, instantly checked, recalled him to himself. He turned round. The solitary gilly who tenanted the lodge, had just brought in a flaring lamp, and the two men could see each other's faces. Ronald had scarcely found out before how changed his uncle was; how aged and wearied-looking. He put his hand now tenderly on his shoulder.

"Uncle Norman," he said very gently, "I wish I could say what I feel. I owe all that makes me glad now to you."

The other made a gesture of dissent. "To Marion," he said, sinking his head still lower—"not to me."

"To both." He hesitated. "Do you mind my speaking to you of Kenneth?"

A sort of spasm crossed the father's face. "Kenneth," he said in a low voice, "is returning to India. The signs of mutiny are becoming more serious, and

his place is by Charley Stuart's side. He goes immediately."

"To India! But, poor fellow, he has only just come home; he is still weak. He has scarcely seen you all —and Marion. Isn't that rather hard on him?"

"Kenneth wishes it;" his voice was scarcely above a whisper.

"I am very sorry for him," resumed Ronald, choosing his words cautiously. "I am sure he has gone through much suffering."

"He has. Pardon me, Ronald, if I prefer not to speak of him. I will only say that my prayer is, that he may be granted a chance to retrieve in some degree, the name that he has"—his voice failed; he put his hand before his eyes, and Douglas standing before him with a deep feeling of respect and of humility, said no word more.

He was too restless to sleep at all that night. General Douglas occupied the one habitable sleeping-room, and Douglas wandered about on the hill, enjoying the midnight storm, and watching impatiently for the first streak of light. At last he went in, piled up a blazing fire, and stretching himself on the hearthrug, slept heavily till morning.

The sun shone brilliantly when he awoke. Swollen burns, white with foam, went leaping and sparkling on their way, and snowy mist-wreaths, floating in the sun, rose from the hill-tops. Here and there a silver streak ran down the mountain side. There had been a sharp frost just before day dawned, and the hoar-frost glittered like jewels among the autumn leaves. The tinted trees looked like the banners of a triumphal procession; scarlet and amber, and flame-colour. The keen and "nimble" air was clear as crystal—the sky intensely blue and swept bare of clouds.

The sun had climbed but a short way over the mountain before Douglas came riding down the fairy glen. His horse stepped on a cloth-of-gold carpet, made of fallen beech-leaves.

"Diane knows nothing. We left it to you to tell her," his uncle said to him, as they parted at the foot of Norman's Tower.

Grizel was the first to meet him in the hall, but she only wrung his hand, and hurried past, pointing back to Diane.

It was a very pale, weary little face with heavy eyes, that greeted him first, but it flushed like a rose, as she came to him with outstretched hands, and words of eager welcome. They had not met since the fateful interview with Kenneth.

"Douglas. I am so glad—so glad!"

He broke into a quick, short, joyous laugh.

"But, oh! sweet-heart," he said, and he drew her to him, pressing her father's letter into her hand, and looking down with glad eyes into her wondering face, "you can't tell half how glad I am!"

Half-an-hour afterwards she took him by the hand, and led him to the door of his mother's room He knocked softly, and went in alone, and as the door closed on him Diane sank upon her knees and prayed.

It was a very long time before he came out, and then the tears were standing in his eyes. "Diane," he said, "she called me Ronald—and she blessed me. Dear love, help me to thank God."

"A lassie from the East," broke out Grizel suddenly. "She has done it. Don't you see it, Ronald? —Marion!"

"My dear Grizzy, I don't see certainly; but we are going to Marion presently," he said.

"India—the East; she was born in India," continued Grizel, incoherent with excitement. "'The red hand white.' 'The Doom of Dalbraith.' She has saved you, Ronald."

"She has indeed," he answered gravely.

"But don't you see? Isn't it most remarkable? The false is true now, and your red hand, my poor Ronald, is washed white by our own lassie from the East. The doom that we have feared from generation to generation has been averted—and by our Marion."

"Brave, faithful Marion!" he said, as Diane came to his side.

"And you are really happy, Ronald?" asked Grizel, beaming on them both.

"Happy," he echoed with a quick downcast glance at the shining brown head close to his shoulder. "Happy! why, Grizel——"

LAST WORDS

So our story—the story of Ronald and Diane—is finished—or begun. And the sun shines at Dalbraith.

There is one who has brought late honour on the house. One who, when the red war-clouds closed darkly over India, was ever full of courage, ever steadfast, ever faithful to his trust. One who in the open field, and in the awful siege of Lucknow, did not fail, nor flinch; who in the extremest hour of peril helped to hold up the courage of the dwindling garrison, who prized not his own life, but freely risked it for the sake of others, and who ever, through all those gruesome months, bore in his heart two inspiring names, those of "Father" and of "Marion."

He was not the less brave, the less daring, the less enduring, that there was little room in his mind

for the thought of fame won for himself. From first to last one motive actuated him, one passion nerved him,—the motive of atonement—the passionate longing to comfort his old father, and to heal his wound.

He came home when the troubles were over, leaving behind him a name that was honoured through the length and breadth of India, and he found that old father, waiting for the calm closing of his earthly days.

Those at Dalbraith watched eagerly for their soldier's coming; they feared he would not be in time for what they knew he longed for—one word of approval from his father's lips.

Their dear General could not see his son's face when at last he came, but he knew his voice, and a smile that was like the glory of a sunset lit up his face.

"Kenneth," he said joyfully, "my son;" and as Kenneth knelt down, all listened intently, for they had thought to hear his voice no more. And the words he spoke were half his own, half familiar words, older and more beautiful than his.

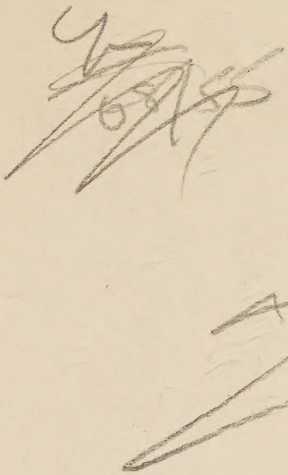
"Kenneth," he said slowly and with a smile; "Kenneth, my son, dearly beloved and longed for; my joy—and crown."

A great gladness lit up the worn face of the soldier son—the great gladness of a long sorrow ended.

He kissed the dear grey face, then knelt again, listening if haply he should speak once more. No words followed.

But was there indeed need of any other word?

THE END



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